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## Books by Vida D. Scudder

SOCIALISM AND CHARACTER.

A LISTENER IN BABEL.

THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT IN THE MODERN ENGLISH POETS.

SOCIAL IDEALS IN ENGLISH LETTERS.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
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# THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT IN THE MODERN ENGLISH POETS

BY

VIDA D. SCUDDER

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# THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT IN THE MODERN ENGLISH POETS

## INTRODUCTION

A GREAT poetry has accompanied our century of swift development in thought and deed. Only within the last decade has it sunk into silence, with the death of Tennyson and Browning. Swinburne and Morris, our only surviving poets, have nothing new to say; no younger men are rising to take the vacant places. So far as we can tell, the story of our modern English song is ended.

That the hush which has fallen upon us precedes a new creation, who can doubt? Our poetry has known a full development; but our prose increases every year in volume and power, and its story is just begun. It is feeling its way in the dubious region of social experiment and applied democracy, and the way is hard to find. Modern poetry, on the other hand, has been occupied rather with spiritual life than social problem; and the whole spiritual epoch which lies behind us finds, in its progress towards peace, full record in our verse.

The poetry of the revolution beheld ideals; Victorian poetry has tested them. We have now both vision and knowledge. The unrealized glory of life spiritual and social has been shown to us;

ours, too, is experience in the wide world of outer fact and the adventures of the inner life. Our early poets chanted the love of freedom, of nature, and of man; the Victorian age has given us a maturer poetry, thought-freighted, and of melody less divine. Yet the poets of doubt in these latter days have gleaned what beauty may be found in that wan country, and while poets of art have sought escape from the lassitude of ideas, poets of faith have sung to us the triumph of the soul.

Great powers have guided the movement of modern song; science, democracy, and the power of the historic past.

The first to be noted is science; for no other stirs so subtly in the secret life of poetry. Its intuitions have led the imagination to a new freedom, widening scope yet accentuating law. More obvious than science, the power of democracy hardly needs emphasis; it shaped the dreams of our youth, as it controls the strife of our prime. In the poetic history of Wordsworth, sanest of our poets, we may trace a prophecy of the full sequence of its power over modern men. But it would be shame to know by inference and record only the glorious faith which has given impetus alike to labor and to song. In Wordsworth, the sober movement of democracy is preserved for us: in Shelley, its first spiritual and social ideals. To place these beside the ideals of the Middle Ages, to compare Dante and Shelley, will show us the strength and weakness, the promise and danger, inherent in the revolution.

It is not only new forces, or forces in a novel guise, that have formed our poetry. We are knit to the past, and our spiritual restlessness no less than our accentuation of learning impel us to study its message more intelligently than any other time has studied it, and to seek its shelter more earnestly. The movement towards the past begins in the poetry of the revolution: but it finds full sweep only in the age of Victoria. Advancing, then, we find democracy no longer a dream but an attitude. Its influence has become indirect; would we know where it is leading, we must watch the new method of realism and note the new accent on character. This accent and method find fullest scope in the naturalistic and humorous work of Browning.

Science, democracy, and the past are the guides of modern poetry; but the knowledge of truth is its goal. In the Victorian age, it first becomes fully conscious of its quest, and its different stages may clearly be studied. We may be led to doubt, in reading this sad poetry of search, whether the goal is ever to be won. Yet, having followed the quest, we behold the vision at last, and, standing on the Delectable Mountains, learn what the poets of our great epoch in its two periods have discerned of the Celestial City.

Let us study, then, the influence of science in all our poets; the new democracy, especially in Wordsworth; the early religious and social ideals, especially in Shelley; the power of the past in the poetry of reversion; the power of the present in

the ironic art of Browning; the poetry of religious inquiry in its various phases; and finally the outlook of faith. So studying, we shall come to feel that the poetry of our age has a vital unity, and witnesses to an advance of the spirit, straight as the logic of experience, from doubt to faith and cheer.

# I

## SCIENCE AND THE MODERN POETS

### 1. *The Might of Science*

DEMOCRACY and Science have been the peculiar master-forces of our poetic growth. They have shaped the course of thought and imagination during that great period which, with unkind disregard for the labor in name-hunting entailed on posterity, we call for the present the modern age. To understand our poetry even a little, we must watch for the lines which manifest their control.

Democracy, Science, and Art.

Which force is the greater, none can say; but one alone can be studied in its completeness. For democracy with all its might is yet in its childhood. The political revolution may be accomplished; the social revolution is of the future, dimly foreseen by many a prophet, clearly foretold by none. But if the true social revolution be a thing of the future, the scientific revolution is assuredly a thing of the past. That the exclusive power of scientific thought has passed its prime, is evidenced by our present reaction towards mysticism; a reaction signaled by friends and foes alike, with amazed regret by M. Zola and the friends of the knowable, with hope almost equally amazed by the votaries of the Unseen, in art and

faith. For almost half a century, scientific conceptions were intellectually supreme. They are so no longer. The influence of these conceptions on our poetry is then of primary interest, since they have had, in a sense, their perfect work.

Looking past the reaction which has just set in, we can easily see that Science, or rather the image of life which it introduced, has been the great protagonist of the century. Science and Religion! In their intercourse has centred the chief drama of the modern world. Fragments of their impassioned dialogue have filled the air, wafted to us from pulpit and platform, from books of the hour or from popular magazine. Which is the victor? However we may answer, the contest is quieted to-day. If not settled, it has at least retired into the background, there to hold urbane and respectable fellowship with the discussion between Fate and Freewill. Meanwhile through all the century has run a sub-action, brighter and more serene, yet with crises of its own, — a Benedick and Beatrice affair, of quips and coquetry and slurs, of seeming antagonism concealing perhaps, as in Shakespeare's joyous, immortal lovers, depth of real attraction unconfessed. Science and Art! What of their intercourse? Seeming foes, who cannot meet without flouting — shall the outcome of their converse be separation, marriage, or death?

All sorts of people give all sorts of answers. Some, like M. Zola, claim that the art of the future will be a branch of science, that it will be absorbed

in the demonstrable Fact, and will record pathological and physical conditions delicately as a sensitive machine. They cry aloud with Whitman: —

"The étui of surgical instruments, and the étui of oculist's or aurist's instruments or dentist's instruments,
The cylinder-press, the hand-press, the frisket and tympan, the compositor's stick and rule,
In them your themes and hints and provokers:
'If not, the whole earth has no themes or hints or provokers, — and never had.'"

Many a thinker, on the other hand, shudders at this flaunting claim. The critics cry in sorrow of spirit that no age of science can be an age of song. Again and again we have been told that as science comes to dominate the present, art will become a memory of the past.

We stand to-day on the limit-line of two centuries. Looking back, we can appeal not to theory but to experience. And in this vexed dispute, experience gives no doubtful answer. To the scientist the earth must forever roll around the central solar fire; to the poet the sun must forever set behind the western hills; yet science and poetry are friends, not foes; the nature of one passes into the very being of the other. The scientist seeks truth to widen knowledge, the poet to quicken life. We have a Dalton, we have a Shelley, we have a Darwin, we have a Browning. Above the din of machinery and the buzz of analysis there floats upward an unceasing music; and we say with exultation that the century of science has been also a century of song.

Yet the song of the age of science finds in surgical instrument or physiological experiment neither theme nor provoker. Art must forever breathe the air of mystery; and if science, as Zola claims, destroys mystery, it must also destroy song. But in truth science, pressing out as victor among the world's secrets, reveals them while it invades. Extending the limits of our knowledge, it extends also our perception of that vast outlying country where light and darkness blend, and the hidden Infinite impinges on the human and the known. Art has never so reverently recognized, as in this day of science, that the eternal facts with which it deals — man in the presence of God, of Nature, of his own soul — are eternal mystery.

Evolution as Theme.

Long before the marvels of our modern time, Wordsworth uttered a remarkable prophecy. "The man of Science," he wrote, "seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude. The poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is on the countenance of Science. . . . If the labours of men of science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the poet will sleep then no more than at present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the man of science,

not only in these general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of science itself. The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, the Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of their respective sciences shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings. If the time should ever come when what is now called science, thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on as it were a form of flesh and blood, the poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the Being thus produced as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man."

The noble prophecy has been nobly fulfilled. "Carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of science themselves," the poets have made the great conceptions of modern science "dear and familiar inmates of the household of man." Their delicate use of scientific detail is no less marked than their superb rendering of scientific generalizations. It is of course the wide vision of evolution that chiefly kindles their spirits. Nor need we wonder if some of the noblest songs of triumph were chanted before science had uttered her knowledge aloud. For the imagination is ever prophetic; and if science opens the road to the poet, it is no less true that the poet again and again

opens the road to science. It seems as if every new thought stirred long in the unconscious soul of the race, and it were matter of indifference whether poetry or science first found the spoken word.

As a matter of fact, the chief poetic passages which treat directly the modern evolutionary conception are really prophetic, written before the new creed was fairly spoken. There are three great modern passages dealing with the universe as a whole in relation to man: the second and fourth act of Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound," written in 1819; the lines in the last act of Browning's "Paracelsus," written in 1833; and cantos fifty-four to fifty-six, and one hundred and eighteen, in Tennyson's "In Memoriam," published in 1850. "The Origin of Species" was not published till 1859, yet every one of these passages expresses a clear conception of evolution as distinct from the then current idea of spasmodic and special creations.

In the bewildering second act of the "Prometheus Unbound," the thought is rather Hegelian than Darwinian. It is the vision of a spiritual evolution, gradually informing the unconscious universe with conscious life and love. In the fourth act, the radiant colloquy between earth and moon renders with unparalleled grandeur the full cosmic conception of the starry universe, and succeeds, with even more freedom from anthropomorphism than Goethe in the Prologue to Faust, in giving a voice to pure inorganic Being. It is with

superb rush and sweep that the earth predicts the final victories of Science: —

"And the abyss shouts from her depth laid bare,
Heaven, hast thou secrets? Man unveils me; I have none."

The famous passage in Act V. of "Paracelsus," more distinct in its statement of natural, physical evolution, is also deeply religious, with a high Christian Pantheism.

"The centre-fire heaves underneath the earth,
And the earth changes like a human face.
. . . Thus God dwells in all,
From life's minute beginnings, up at last
To man, the consummation of this scheme
Of being, the completion of this sphere
Of life: whose attributes had here and there
Been scattered o'er the visible world before,
Asking to be combined — dim fragments meant
To be united in some wondrous whole,
Imperfect qualities throughout creation,
Suggesting some one creature yet to make —
Some point where all those scattered rays should meet,
Convergent in the faculties of man.

. . . . . .

"Hints and previsions of which faculties
Are strewn confusedly everywhere about
The inferior natures; and all lead up higher,
All shape out dimly the superior race,
The heir of hopes too fair to turn out false,
And Man appears at last: so far the seal
Is put on life; one stage of being complete,
One scheme wound up; and from the grand result
A supplementary reflux of light
Illustrates all the inferior grades, explains
Each back step in the circle."

But Tennyson alone, writing nearer to the time when the new idea was definitely formulated for the public, has grasped the full Darwinian concep-

tion. He passes, in the first phase of his intellectual agony, under that brief shadow of horror lest matter be all and spirit naught which the new science cast at first over the soul. The terrible indifference of Nature casts shudder and chill over his warm, blind trust: —

> "She cries, 'A thousand types are gone, —
> I care for nothing, all shall go.'"

Later, when a great moral victory has been won, the intuition of a universe informed with God and moving towards a divine though far-off event is vouchsafed to the poet; and in the one hundred and eighteenth canto he sums up with marvelous conciseness the strict creed of evolution, interpreting it in the light of immortality and of God. It is in these bitter cantos of conflict between natural law and the mystery of immortal love that the direct convictions of science find their most interesting treatment in our modern verse. And it is in such poetry as this that we must look for the real use of science by the modern imagination; not in Whitman's triumphant display of raw material, nor in Zola's translation of life into physical terms.

Evolution as Influence.

But the union of poet and scientist has gone even farther than Wordsworth foresaw. Not only has poetry invaded science, and carried away new themes of cosmic scope; science has invaded poetry. Passages treating directly of scientific subjects are rare in our poets, little holiday trips of the imagination, as it were, into foreign

lands. Yet we have hardly a modern poem, whatever its subject, not thrilled through and through and modified in its very fibre by consciousness of the great Law of Evolution.

Would we trace the power of this consciousness, we have only to turn to our older literature and note the effect of its absence. Before the day of Wordsworth, the idea of cosmic evolution is, speaking broadly, unknown to poetry. The universe is stationary, except for surface vibration. Spenser, who more than any other English poet loved cosmic speculation, gives us in his fine fragment of "Mutabilitee" the characteristic view. The Titaness, arrogant and superb, claims the world for her own, but, despite countless witnesses and brilliant argument, is condemned by Nature in significant lines: —

> "I well consider all that ye have said,
> And find that all things steadfastness do hate,
> And changèd be; yet, being rightly wayd,
> They are not changèd from their first estate,
> But by their change their being do dilate,
> And, turning to themselves at length againe,
> Do work their own salvation so by Fate.
> Then over them change doth not rule and reigne,
> But they rule over change, and do their states maintain."

"Turning to themselves againe." Rest, not onward movement, is the deepest law of nature and of life. The conception of a progressive evolution had not dawned; it was not to dawn for centuries.

It was in the French Revolution that the idea of Progress entered. Conceived with defiant vio-

lence, it is quite unscientific, and applied not to nature but to the narrow sphere of human history. The writers of the revolution brandish the idea as a flag, claim it vehemently as a right, but fail to recognize it serenely as a fact. Even Shelley never divests himself of the belief that redemption is to be achieved by a violent and sudden overthrow of evil; his beautiful evolutionary philosophy is, as we have seen, mystically rather than materially conceived. It is with the Victorian age that the conception of progress, ceasing to be emotional and political, became purely scientific. The latent idea swiftly grew to be the governing principle of art and life. We must leave the use of science as Subject; we must trace its value as Influence. To this influence is due the one distinctive modern tone, common to all our poets from Wordsworth to Swinburne. Our poetry of character, of nature, and of thought is shaped by it; its message, whatever the future may bring, has for our generation sunk below the region of conviction to that of intuition, and while convictions are of slight value to the imagination, intuitions are ever vital.

## 2. *The Force-Idea*

Force in the Poetry of Nature.

The idea of a purposeful force at the heart of the world is the centre of evolutionary thought; and it has transfigured poetry. Nowhere is its potency more manifest than in that

worshipful Liturgy of Nature chanted for the first time by the modern English poets.

Despite the blitheness of Dan Chaucer and many a gay little lilt of spring and blossom, our older English poetry, meditating on nature, is characteristically sad. "All fairest things are doomed to swiftest death," seems its murmured burden. A deep horror of change rests upon it; of change, the symbol of decay, the messenger of Death. Spenser's "Mutabilitee," superb and terrible, is foe to gods and men. Very characteristic is the pathetic note struck again and again by Shakespeare in the Sonnets: —

> "When I have seen the hungry ocean gain
> Advantage on the kingdom of the shore,
> And the firm soil win of the watery main
> Increasing store with loss, and loss with store,
> . . . . . .
> This thought is as a death, which cannot choose
> But weep to have that which it fears to lose." [1]

To us moderns, the deeper meditation on Nature brings joy, not pain. For we have learned to recognize beneath her ceaseless ebb and flow, so often seemingly cruel, a steady onward movement towards fullness of life unguessed. In the light of science, change has become the symbol, no longer of decay but of promise. Feared once as the messenger of despair it now is hailed as messenger of hope, for we know it as the proof of perpetuity of life, through varying forms. Shelley may heave a superficial and wistful sigh over the fading glories

[1] Sonnet LXIV.

of sunset, or music dying as it is born; it is with deeper exultation that he cries: —

> "Worlds on worlds are rolling ever
> From creation to decay,
> Like the bubbles on a river,
> Trembling, hasting, borne away." [1]

The storms of Autumn are to his singing soul,

> "The trumpet of a prophecy: O Wind,
> If Winter come, can Spring be far behind?" [2]

As the century goes on, the new note of triumph in transition grows ever clearer and sweeter. In the hour of spiritual victory Tennyson exclaims: —

> "There rolls the deep where grew the tree.
> O earth, what changes hast thou seen!
> There, where the long street roars, hath been
> The stillness of the central sea.
>
> "The hills are shadows, and they flow
> From form to form, and nothing stands;
> They melt like mist, the solid lands,
> Like clouds they shape themselves and go." [3]

The "hungry ocean" with its "advantage o'er the kingdom of the shore" thus brings a new message. With faith in evolution, nature becomes not a reminder of mortality but a witness to the Eternal.

The new conception has even a more vivid effect on the æsthetic than on the ethical treatment of nature. Motion, of course, is present in nature-poetry from the beginning. The play of day and night, of storm and calm, have ever caught the poet's eye. But the simple changes noted bear

[1] Chorus to *Hellas*.
[2] *Ode to the West Wind*.
[3] *In Memoriam*, Canto CXXIII.

no relation to an underlying energy, and the imagination supremely loves repose. In the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, a landscape, to be lovely, must be still. The religious landscapes of all early art are motionless; only the faintest of breezes is allowed in Dante's Earthly Paradise. Thus also Spenser, following Tasso and Ariosto, in the Garden of Acrasia: —

> "Thereto the heavens, always jovial,
> Look't on them lovely, still in steadfast state,
> Ne suffered storm nor frost on them to fall
> Their tender buds and leaves to violate." [1]

To a much later time, the treatment remained pictorial, and nature was a silent panorama. The poems of Cowper, Thompson, and Gray are a complete gallery, from which we may take down one detached picture after another. That in the evanescence of beauty and the swift passage from glory to glory lies nature's charm, was a hidden secret.

Sunrise and sunset are as a rule treated conventionally, from Chaucer to Gray, though one pauses at the assertion, remembering the approach of Milton's "Still Evening," the "light thickens" of Macbeth, and Fletcher's exquisite bit: —

> "Now the day begins to break,
> And the light shoots like a streak
> Of subtle fire" —

But the generalization is true, as such things go. It is hard to conceive a poet who had steeped his soul in the joy of the dawn, confining himself to

[1] *The Faerie Queene*, II. 12, *st.* 51.

the car of Phœbus or the rosy fingers of Aurora. Yet Chaucer does not describe such moments in the natural method, nor is he drawn to them. No; the early morning, when matters are settled, when we are sure of a number of hours of good, steady daylight, is the time he loves. Even when the idea of motion would seem to be inherent in the object described, he evades it. His delight in the fresh country is summed up in his love for his favorite "briddes." Allusions to them are constant in his poems; but for all that he gives of their airiness and lightness, these winged spirits of the breeze incarnate might just as well be little birds of wood. They sit on branches and converse politely; they do not fly, they simply change their position; one is sure that they would settle with a thud. Never once, so far as I know, does Chaucer note the characteristic flight of a bird. He distinguishes them otherwise: —

> "The swalow, murderer of the bees small,
> That maken honie of flowers fresh of hew;
> The wedded turtle, with his feathers true,
> The phesaunt, scorner of the rocks by night." [1]

We can hardly estimate the distance between Canace's Falcon, with her debonair talk, and Wordsworth's little "Green Linnet," that "brother of the dancing leaves," —

> "Amid that tuft of hazel-trees,
> Where the flutter of his wings
> Upon his back and body flings
> Shadows and sunny glimmerings
> That cover him all over."

[1] *The Parlement of Foules*, Stanza li.

We have a long road to travel before we shall reach this dainty appreciation of the charm of a perpetual quiver. Even as late as Milton there is still an utter deadness and fixedness in all delineations of nature. What a magnificent opportunity for describing the gradual dawn of living beauty was in the hands of the man who did not hesitate to write poetry about the creation! Does he avail himself of it? Does he give us any suggestion of the tender grace of the young, wondering world, the slow awakening and unfolding of all fair things till they reach the perfection of their loveliness? Oh no! There is chaos, void, abyss, emptiness. We wait and watch. Suddenly — hey! presto! The world is made. There it whirls, — round, smooth, neatly finished. There are the oceans with the fishes, the mountains, the trees, yes, and the flowers and beasts: —

> "Forth flourished thick the clust'ring vine, forth crept
> The swelling gourd, up stood the corny reed,
> Embattled in her field, and th' humble shrub,
> And bush, with frizzled hair implicit." [1]

It is all in admirable order, ready for use.

In the eighteenth century we begin to note a curious change. A pseudo-scientific spirit appears. It treats mechanically various truths which our own time was to render spiritually; and among these truths, it grasps with especial clearness that of the unceasing activity pervading nature. But how trivial is the apprehension of the principle and its scope! Listen to Cowper as he tells us: —

[1] *Paradise Lost*, VII. 320–323.

> "Constant rotation of th' unwearied wheel
> That nature rides upon, maintains her health,
> Her beauty, her fertility." [1]

And a little later, with true scientific accuracy,—

> "Its own revolvency upholds the world."

What use does he make of this great principle, which he has thus for the first time recognized in poetry? He employs it as an argument to induce lazy people to take a brisk walk after dinner.

Then dawns our own century; and, with a transition so abrupt as to be hardly recognizable, comes a radical change. The truth of universal force is recognized by science as a physical fact; it becomes in poetry a spiritual law. It follows that the delight of the poets centres no longer in permanent scenes, but dwells rather on those constantly shifting and successive manifestations of power which forever struggle to shadow forth to us the ideal beauty that lies beyond our senses' ken. The old style of dry enumeration vanishes; the sadness of decay is recognized as the necessary condition of the law of growth; and the treatment of nature, which had been purely pictorial, becomes akin to another art, — the art of the musician. As the essence of music lies in change, and the chord, indefinitely prolonged, would be no music at all, so it seems to us with the deeper harmony of the life of the world. It is curious to see how this love for transition as distinguished from permanence pervades nearly every allusion

[1] *The Task*, I. 368–370.

to nature in our modern poetry. The power delicately to seize fleeting effects, elusive phases of beauty, — is not this what lends interest for us to a poet's work? Not the moments when the beauty is fixed, but those when it is fugitive, are the favorites of our poets. Listen for a moment to this description in "The Sunset:" —

> "There now the sun had set, but lines of gold
> Hung on the ashen clouds, and on the points
> Of the far level grass and nodding flowers,
> And the old dandelion's hoary head,
> And mingled with the shades of evening, lay
> On the brown massy wood; and in the East
> The broad and burning moon lingeringly rose
> Between the black trunks of the farthest trees,
> While the faint stars were gathering overhead."

See how evanescent is the moment which the poet has chosen to depict. Another instant and the gold will have faded from the dun soft clouds, and the moon have risen above the treetops. See how the charm of the scene lies in the tremulous sense of a beauty too unearthly to linger, the reference in the first line to the day that had fled, in the last to the gathering night. The lines are Shelley's; and more, perhaps, than any other poet Shelley is steeped in this sense of elastic and never-resting force. He turns aside with impatience from anything fixed. The soaring circle of the lark, the flowing of the river, the drift of the cloud across the sky, the onward sweep of the west wind, — these are the aspects on which he constantly lingers. Few of them, indeed, will you find emphasized in older poetry. Among our

other modern poets the same tendency is hardly less marked. The revolution in temper can hardly be measured between a generation perfectly satisfied with Milton's mechanical catalogues, or Thompson's stereotyped and isolated studies, and one which expresses its attitude towards nature in such a poem as Wordsworth's Lucy. In poets the most diverse — in Tennyson, Rossetti, Kingsley, Emerson — we find the same delicate vitality in the treatment of nature; and we can ascribe the change to nothing if not to the new perception of all phenomena as alike maintained and destroyed by an innate principle of force.

> "Uprose the merry Sphinx,
> And crouched no more in stone;
> She melted into purple cloud,
> She silvered in the moon.
> She spired into a yellow flame,
> She flowered in blossoms red;
> She flowed into a foaming wave,
> She stood Monadnoc's head." [1]

Force in the Poetry of Character.

In the treatment of nature, the change induced by the intuition of force is great; in the treatment of human life, it is still greater. Clear, living, forcible is the character delineation in the old romances. The description is simple, but natures were simple then; and a few swift touches may give us more than a whole analytical novel.

How these men live for us! Achilles, the impetuous and noble; Ulysses, the wary and sad; Launcelot, "meekest man and the gentlest that

[1] Emerson: *The Sphinx*, Stanza xvi.

ever ate in hall among ladies; and sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest:" — we know them all, as we know the man we talk to in the horse-cars, the acquaintance from whom we parted last night. In the most novel of novels you shall find no gallery of figures that, for subtle humor, for kindly yet keen discrimination, shall exceed old Dan Chaucer's company of pilgrims. Yet a fundamental difference in method we all perceive between the "Morte d'Arthur" and the "Idylls of the King," between the "Prologue" and the "Ring and the Book." For our modern study of character finds its interest and value only as it traces growth, — it centres in the idea of development; while to the older writers this idea is completely ignored. With them, a type, once drawn, is unchangeable. The inevitable progression of years leaves no mark even on the outward man. Helen returns to the home she had left thirty years before, still calm in eternal beauty; Palamon and Arcite, an indefinite number of "years or tweye" having elapsed, fight for Emelye with all the ardor of youth. Neither is there any change of the inner nature. Circumstances may storm and rage and batter; extremes of fortune succeed each other with startling rapidity; death threatens, love encircles, power crowns, — yet the hero remains throughout passive and unmoved; as he was in the beginning, so he emerges at the end. Griselda the girl receives with meek brow and folded hands the summons to wed her feudal lord; with meek brow and folded hands Griselda the

matron welcomes her husband's bride. Years have passed by, filled with strange and bitter experience; but they have not affected her, — she remains a constant quantity. This curious subjective immobility pervades all the characters of fiction and poetry until our own day. Is it heretical to say that even in Shakespeare we find traces of its influence? Do we ever think of the childhood or youth of his characters? No one has given with equal power the conflicting passions that play about the central point of individuality; he has not shown us that individuality altered in its very texture through the action of some great moral force. Shakespeare's characters may break; but they never yield, and through yielding grow. But whatever may be thought of our great master, there can be no doubt of the application of this principle in more recent times. The novels of fifty years ago no longer interest us. Their charm is gone. Is it not because they lived before the dawn of this new day? We find in them excellent pictures of still life; but however crowded they may be with adventure and even with action, the springs of the action are always without and not within. This is emphatically true of the representative novelist, Scott. There is much clatter of arms in his stories, much hurrying from palace to heath, from heath to dungeon; but through it all reigns the same fixed calm of characters immutable in weakness or in strength.

Our modern character-literature is revolutionized by the simple introduction of the growth-

idea. Perhaps most striking, certainly most extended, in fiction, the vitality of the idea was yet first signaled in poetry. For surely it is in that enchanting and seemingly uncaused tenderness for children, that startling, exquisite rendering of babyhood which so suddenly appears in Blake and Burns and Wordsworth, that we trace the first intimation of our modern interest in beginnings. The temper which as Wordsworth himself tells us,

> "Would place,
> As in some hours might not be unfelt,
> Among the bowers of Paradise itself
> The budding rose above the rose full-blown," [1]

is strong in this dew-fresh poetry of childhood. Pure infancy, undefiled and undefined, speaks through the lisping baby or angel-music of Blake; a maturer age, with the dawn of thought and of the moral affections, attracts the poet of Lucy. To Blake and Wordsworth alike, the child is cherished, not only as the witness to immortality but as the father of the man — a promise and a prophecy of the life that is to be.

Thus the emphasis on beginnings was charmingly apparent at the outset of the age that was to love growth with supreme affection. It finds fit complement and conclusion in the vigorous poetry of maturer life given us at the close of the epoch by our masterful singer of the strong man in his battles, and chanter of the triumph of old age. Robert Browning is the one poet who has taken human life for his exclusive province; and his

[1] *The Prelude*, Book XI.

method has for its very soul the tracing of development. Colombe, Caponsacchi, Tresham, Djabal, Chiappino, Ottima, — in each and all of them interest centres in those critical moments

> "When the spirit's true endowments
> Stand out plainly from its false ones,
> And apprise it if pursuing
> Or the right way or the wrong way,
> To its triumph or undoing."[1]

To Browning, cessation is impossible; arrested development the one tragedy of life.

Force in the Poetry of Thought.

The effect of the force-idea on the poetry of character appears late, in its matured form of faith in development. On the poetry of nature it appears early, in its simpler form of feeling for law and life. The course of the century has emphasized last of all a third order of verse, distinctly modern; the poetry of Reflection. We have sought to penetrate, not only the soul of nature and of man, but the soul of thought. This poetry of intellectual inquiry belongs especially to the age of Victoria. Sometimes akin to the poetry of character, it differs by its more subjective cast. It appears simultaneously with the scientific habit of analysis, and really is one aspect of that habit, applied to psychology. And surely we may say without fantasy that the new passion for development creates it. For, if this poetry of reflection, as we find it in Arnold and Clough, in Tennyson and Browning, differs

[1] *Cristina.*

from the dead didactic verse of the eighteenth century, it is because into our modern work has passed the breath and flame of change. We no longer present results; we study process. When a writer of the last century sought to compose an "Essay on Man," he sat down and meditated; decided what could to advantage be said on the subject, formulated his conclusions in the most elegant language at his disposal, and bestowed on the world a rhythmical row of sententious and formed opinions. A modern writer does not compose an "Essay on Man:" the scientific spirit has saved us in a measure from the love of sweeping assumption. But, in such contemplative verse as is our closest parallel to the old pseudo-philosophical writing, his method is new. Once more, development confronts us; searching and novel in the poetry of ideas as in the poetry of character. Our poets give us, not fossil opinions, but thought in the act. We turn aside from even the shortest poem which fails to convey some sense of the movement of belief or mood. In all our writers we detect this modern note. We judge by reach, not grasp. Browning's non-dramatic poems hold us by their subtle "guesses at truth." Arnold struggles through the storm and stress of thought towards a peace ever longed for, never attained, and we give him a sympathy of the affections forfeited by the complacent working theory of his middle life. Clough fights for faith through bewildering doubts of his very power to believe, and our spirits join him in the battle. The fullest

instance of this our modern passion for the movement of the living soul is the central poem of the epoch, Tennyson's "In Memoriam." The whole interest of the poem is in tracing a gradual process of salvation, individual and social. The soul, numb at first with despair, is slowly roused to consciousness, and led step by step, through shifting phases of love and fear, to the certain hope of reunion; self-absorbed in private and special sorrow, it is drawn at last to share in the broader life and hope of all humanity. The gradual experience of years is faithfully reflected in its vital sequence, each phase, incomplete in itself, prepares the way for its successor; and the final triumph of the conclusion gains its whole value from the record of the struggle and perplexity by which it has been attained. The passion for development controls our writers. Ours is the age of the poetry of struggle, not of victory; of desire, not of achievement; of growth, not of rest.

### 3. *The Unity-Idea.*

Into the poetry which deals with nature, man, and thought, the intuition of active Force has then brought a new note. It has revealed the living movement of the human mind, it has created the ideal of character manifest in development, and it has given us a universe no longer rigidly fixed, but instinct with tremulous charm.

The Idea Absent.

The intuition of Unity is involved with that of

Force in evolutionary thought; it has become indeed the very atmosphere of our minds. Absent except as fantasy from cruder and more primitive times, this perception has made our modern science a new thing, and has vitally, though indirectly, modified our poetry.

It is curious to see how subtly this sense is lacking in primitive literatures, and in what strange ways, often trifling, the absence shows itself. The early human consciousness, like that of the child, grasps parts, not wholes. Witness the fondness of all early times for proverbs and gnomic poetry, disconnected scraps of wisdom, which have floated to us down the centuries from Aryan, Greek, Teuton, and Slav. Witness the absence of cause and effect in those old epics and romances where naïve charm and childishness spring alike from the lack of wholeness of vision. Impossible sequences and spasmodic relations are the order of the day, even so late as Ariosto, till the absence of cause makes the dizzy reader of the "Orlando Furioso" lose all relation to mother-earth. The nonsense even of our ancestors is founded not on the imitation but on the denial of logic: — "The shadow of an egg carried the new year upon the bottom of a pot; two old new combs made a ball to run the trot; I cried out, without saying a word, 'take the feather of an ox, and clothe a wise fool with it.'"

The very figures of the older poets show, even to a late period, a tendency to the same absence of connection. How else shall we explain that

cold love for ingenuity which demands, not that a figure reveal likeness, but that it startle by incongruity? The more far-fetched and impossible the resemblance, the more credit to the poet for worrying it out; and he achieves the greatest triumph who contrives to bring together two objects most widely disconnected by nature and common sense. "Conceits" — there could be no better name for these extraordinary concoctions of fancy. Their cold ingenuity is sometimes appalling; as in this:

> "Our two souls, which are one,
> Though I must go, endure not yet
> A breach, but an expansion,
> Like gold to airy thinness beat.
> If they be two, they are two, so
> As stiff twin-compasses are two.
> Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
> To move, but doth, if th' other do.
> And tho' it in the centre sit,
> Yet when the other far doth roam,
> It leans and hearkens after it,
> And grows erect, as that comes home.
> Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
> Like th' other foot, obliquely run;
> Thy firmness makes my circle just,
> And makes me end where I begun."[1]

Nor are the "conceits" of the "metaphysical" poets the only late survivals of a deficient sense for unity. If the novels and romances of the last century are less absurdly incongruous than the mediæval epic, their superficial unity is a mere concession to observation. The age that could produce and read a "Castle of Otranto" had no grasp on the principle of cause and effect. The

[1] Donne: *A Valediction Forbidding Mourning.*

absence of any feeling for coherence peeps out, not only in the fiction but in the literary theories of the age of Queen Anne. Poems are valued not as wholes but for the number of isolated beauties they contain, and the ambition of the poet is, as Gosse has pointed out, to say something brilliant in every line. No higher praise could be awarded a poem than that given in 1783 by the respected Mr. Harvey, remarking — was it not anent a little lilt of one William Blake? — that it "abounds in picturesque, useful, and striking sentiments." The power of judging wholes hardly appears, even in the literary criticism of the "Edinburgh Review;" it was reserved for a scientific age.

The Idea Present and Justified.

Is there need to say how great and subtle a change has thrilled through the very substance of modern poetry? Unity, once achieved by occasional instinct, has become a recognized æsthetic law. Our nonsense to-day must be pretended logic; the delicious absurdities of Alice in Looking-Glass Country all depend on the solemn manner in which reasoning is tipped upside down, so that if you want to get away from a house you must walk at it, and to keep still must run as quick as you can, and do all your screaming before you are hurt. Our figures, too, have felt the breath of a new mystery. Rossetti cries of his Lady in "The Portrait:" —

> "While hopes and aims long lost with her
> Stand round her image, side by side,

Like tombs of pilgrims that have died
About the Holy Sepulchre."

Outwardly, the resemblance is remote as in Donne; inwardly, what passionate vision of oneness! The new impulse for unity renders the fantastic not only impossible but tedious. We can tolerate in fiction no lack of verisimilitude, in verse no hustling of ideas into separate departments. Life is one. Feeling pervades our poetic metaphysics, and our pure sentiment is touched by thought. Our lyrics become little dramas, and our epics breathe philosophy. The power to form connected plots, the fusion of different orders of poetry, the critical conception of an art-product as an organic whole, all witness to our instinctive feeling for interdependence. From our nonsense to our religion, from Wonderland Alice to Tennyson and his Higher Pantheism, our art is moulded by the perception that life is one.

The imagination from the beginning of time has wished to bear witness to this oneness of life; and in its greatest moments it has succeeded, as in the superb, instinctive artistic unity of the Shakespearean drama. But only in its greatest. Human thought has ever reached out for unity; again and again, seeming to find nothing but diversity, it has sunk back baffled, and taken refuge in emphasis on detail or in puerile fancy: —

"Yet earth drenched, water proves, which boiled, turns air —
Hot air makes fire: condensed, all change and home repair,"

cries a poor old poet, voicing the queer philosophy of his day; and there is pathos in the absurd lines,

with their struggle to find beneath varying shows the true oneness of the universe.

Such a desire for unity must exist as long as poetry is poetry, — that is, the result of a creative imagination. For the essential quality of the imagination is that it perceives wholes, not parts. The unimaginative writer sees any detail as an isolated fact; a yellow primrose is to him a yellow primrose. The poet cannot touch a flower or a fly without feeling its relation to the great whole of which it is a part. It is to him symbol as well as thing. And in this peculiar faculty of seeing broadly and deeply lies the strange power of the imagination to purify and extend our vision's range.

In this vague conviction of interdependence it has not stood alone. Philosophy and religion have alike sympathized in it. Deep down in the human heart — so deep that we are tempted to call it a primary intuition — has always lain the belief in the harmony of the universe. Such belief is at the bottom of all symbolism. From the earliest dawnings of racial consciousness to the religious services of our modern churches there has been a constant and elaborate effort to express in worship the unseen by the seen. Nothing can be stranger than to study the repeated efforts to escape from this method and the constant reversion to it in increasingly subtle form. And the instinct is justified; for it rests on the conviction that the spirit can only be revealed to us through the flesh; that the lower can only exist in relation to the higher;

and that thus each tiniest fact of the natural world must bear witness to truths beyond itself. The faith that the arch of the heavens above and the blossoming of the earth beneath and the tumultuous joy and pain of the human soul are varying manifestations of the universal Spirit, is part of the heritage of the ages. In the ritual of the Buddhist temple and of the Christian Church, in the poems of the sensuous lover of nature, and the treatises of the abstract thinker, and the visions of the mystic and the seer, we find the same fundamental conviction, triumphant against the assertions of a narrow science and the indifference of a shallow common sense.

Yet that not only common sense, but science, has been against the belief cannot be denied. Deductive science, if it did not discountenance, at least ignored it; inductive science was, until very lately, too busy emphasizing variety to discover unity. Thus faith in it has been perpetually hampered and hindered. It has inevitably been latent rather than dynamic. The dreamers of the world have held it more firmly than have the thinkers. A mystical philosophy here and there would mysteriously hint it; a church would struggle to express it through symbolism too often arbitrary and crude; a Dante or a Spenser would flash it upon us in broken gleams; but never until this century has it been grasped as a universal formative principle of thought. The imagination has been perpetually hampered by the sense of its own irrationality. It has been a mysterious in-

stinct working in opposition to all known law. Hence knowledge and poetry were regarded almost as antitheses; and as soon as scientific conceptions began to spread, the sphere of poetry began apparently to contract. In the last century that sphere was very narrow indeed. The imagination lived, indeed, but it lived a half-hearted existence, opposed by clear thought and confident opinion.

But a change was at hand; it has been witnessed by our own generation; and it is so great and extended in its possibilities that we can hardly wonder to find it faintly apprehended as yet.

It has happened before — it has happened now — that the mysticism of the past has become the practical science of the present. Accurate, dispassionate, and patient study of unimaginative men has established as a fact for the many the secret hypothesis of the few. The unity of law is a truth less to be doubted than the existence of matter. There subsists between all things a relation not arbitrary but vital; for one great connecting principle runs through all the world. What this principle may be — this central truth from which all phenomena derive their significance — science cannot tell us; but it can reveal the existence of such a truth, for it can show us a universal and orderly sequence. Thus the imagination is vindicated; for its instinct is shown to be identical with the deepest of known law. Thus all symbolism receives its sanction, and is at the same time put upon a theoretically rational basis, since it must be no longer invented but sought.

The same temper that governs the minute speculations of a Darwin enables the poet to enter with exquisite rightness into the soul of a daisy, or in moments of gloom to find tranquillity in the aspect of the star-sown heaven. It is impossible to predict the freedom, elasticity, and enlargement of scope in poetic work, when once the imagination realizes that it now works in deepest harmony with truth. How much once vague and despised will find its justification! In the knowledge of the cycles of being through which we have swung upward, we discover the sanction of all mysterious thrills of sympathy to ocean, flower, brute, and the great life of the whirling world. They are no longer sentiment or illusion; they are based on most honest fact. They testify to the actual union of mind and soul with this complex, warm-hearted earth; they bear witness to our unconscious past.

Our modern attitude sees in the charming and ceaseless motion of nature the play of expression upon her face, the witness to the living force within. Yet this very expression would cease to be winsome did we not recognize in the secret might it manifests, a mode of being mysterious indeed, but not alien to our own. If we are able with Shelley to hear nature singing an eternal antiphon to our own experience, if with the higher subjectivity of Wordsworth we can attune our petty voices to the vast music of the world without, we owe this tender intimacy and inwardness of relation to the sense of unity between nature

and our own spirits brought by the great thought of evolution. The instinctive adoption of higher standards of artistic harmony is great, the rejection of capricious and fantastic is significant. But the largest work of the new and mighty intuition of unity has been to draw the heart of nature near to the heart of man.

## 4. *The Realistic Temper*

The influence of modern science upon literature has of course been negative as well as positive. It has ruthlessly destroyed the greater part of the subject-matter of our older poetry. The sweet old classic myths, the dew-drenched mediæval epic with its dragons and gnomes and fair bewitched ladies, — they have vanished, not only from our faith but from our verse. Our heroes no longer slash off each other's heads in the charming old fashion, and wander about in search of a convenient wizard to put them on again; mermaids do not abound in the British Channel or the Atlantic; and even the dear fairies have ceased to trip through our verse in dainty guise. Our strongest poetry ignores such subjects. If we wish to find them treated we must turn to the poetry which is but a morbid though often a powerful effort to reconstruct the past. In whatever direction we look we find evidence that modern poetry has consecrated itself to the study of actual conditions. What is the difference between the loftiest poem and the crudest

Subjection to the Actual.

naturalistic romance? Not that one studies fact while the other rejects it, but that the one photographs while the other interprets. Both insist on literal and accurate truth; both exclude the adventitious elements of interest which were once considered essential. Preternatural and improbable incidents are as rigidly ruled out by a Wordsworth as by a Zola; they are ruled out through the whole extent of modern poetry.

This exclusion is, perhaps, most remarkable, as it is certainly most complete, in one special direction. In the solemn moments when they approached the nearest to the secret of existence, and dealt with the elemental passions of the human heart, the older poets almost invariably sought to add depth and sacredness to their creations by the introduction of an objective supernatural force. Even the poet of widest resources and most free from any taint of morbidness has not shrunk from this expedient. In his most intense situations, where the emotions are strained to the utmost, and the real is separated from the apparent, Shakespeare emphasizes most strongly the supernatural element. The mysterious hags surround Macbeth upon the blasted heath; the gray ghost of the murdered Dane still walks his castle ramparts; the spirit of Cæsar seals the fate of Brutus. In the crisis of the drama, when the actual life of actual man is most intensely portrayed, come these strange visitants of pity or terror.

But to us they appear no more; or, if they appear, it is as faint allegorical attractions, as in-

teresting subjective illusions, at best as the ornament of a graceful mediæval revival, employed in the same spirit as obsolete words, or the quaint customs of a dead chivalry. Where in modern poetry shall you find a genuine, vigorous, effective ghost? Where, indeed, except in the morbid imaginings of a solitary Yorkshire girl, cut off from the current of modern life; and even in that wonderful study of "Wuthering Heights" the ghastly horror of the conception lies in the fact that the spirit of Catharine is neither visible nor mentioned, and is realized only as reflected in the awful bearing of the man possessed. Even in Browning, the lover of abnormal types and diseased conditions, this element is entirely absent. His interest and ours no longer centres in the spirit summoned back to earth; it centres in the twisting and turning of the mind of the so-called medium, his tricks, his whines, his clever sophisms, his half beliefs. The most effective of the older methods of exciting awe has been lost to us.

> "I look for ghosts — but none will force
> Their way to me; 't is falsely said
> That ever there was intercourse
> Between the living and the dead." [1]

This is the conclusion of our serious thought, reflected in our serious poetry.

To all lovers of poetry such a change seemed, at first, very doleful. They looked about — those whose enthusiasm was not aroused by the stupid parts of nature, by worms and sticks and the articulation of cockroaches' wings — with a mourn-

[1] Wordsworth: *The Affliction of Margaret.*

ful expectation of finding life very prosaic. Their childhood's paradise, the sphere in which the imagination lived and worked, had seemingly been hurled away into space; it is no wonder that they gazed after it with sorrowful hearts, and felt that the power of poetic vision would be dimmed and die, deprived of its natural atmosphere.

Yet, after the first, men began to see that there might be compensations for our loss; that the mystery of light may be as suggestive as the mystery of darkness; that men and women, aglow with passion, radiant with thought, wondrous in personality, may prove as interesting as the most delightful of nymphs and griffins; that, in short, the truest idealism may rise from the most genuinely realistic basis. In the midst of our regret for the charming elements of old romance Landor speaks to us: "The human heart is the world of poetry; the imagination is only its atmosphere. Fairies and genii and angels themselves are at best its insects, glancing with unsubstantial wings about its lower regions and less noble edifices." As we fear lest the rejection of the supernatural imply denial of spiritual agencies, we feel, in listening to Carlyle, that perhaps we are only beginning to look for those agencies no longer without us but within us: "Ghosts! There are nigh a thousand million walking the earth openly at noontide; some half-hundred have vanished from it, some half-hundred have arisen on it, ere thy watch ticks once." As the great principles of force and unity gain firmer hold, poetry may

indeed lose something of the fantastic license of the past; but in accepting limitation it will gain a truer freedom, for its highest function is assuredly to work not in subservience to caprice but in harmony with perceived reality.

Deeper than scientific ideas lies the scientific temper. And the notes of this temper are two: reverence for Law, passion for Fact.

Reverence for Law, passion for Fact! These are the principles which working inwardly and silently have renewed our poetry. For literary history clearly shows that their presence and their union could alone bring new life to the imagination of the nineteenth century.

Reverence for Law.

The romantic art of the age of Elizabeth had ignored the limits of law; the classical art of the Augustan age had despised the offers of fact. If the world of the one tends to incoherence, the world of the other is artificial. Before the poetic revolution, classical influences ruled. Restricting scope while they perfected method, rejecting all subjects that implied mystery or defied classification, they reduced poetry to an emptiness not unnoted even in their own day. Wrote Cowley, in a panegyric on Harvey, the discoverer of the circulation: —

> "Thou, Harvey, sought for Truth in Truth's own book,
> The creatures; which by God himself was writ;
> And wisely thought 't was fit
> Not to read comments only upon it,
> But on th' original itself to look.
> Methinks in art's great circle others stand

> **Locked up together, hand in hand.**
> **Every one leads as he is led,**
> **The same bare path they tread,**
> **And dance like fairies, a fantastic round,**
> **But neither change their motion nor their ground."**

Nothing could better describe the condition of poetry during part of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was obvious that unless some renovating and enlarging impulse from without should infuse fresh vigor into poetic thought, that thought was doomed. The direction in which such an impulse would most efficiently work, was also obvious. It should unite the essential power of the two opposing schools. It should recognize Law, more deeply conceived than mere rule, as the controlling principle of nature and of art; at the same time, it must hold the reverent attitude of entire receptivity towards the wide sweep of natural fact.

The influence came; and from the most improbable quarter. The scientific temper, falsely conceived, had seemed to be drying up the very roots of our poetry; in truth, it was to infuse into these same roots a fresh and vigorous sap.

Science brought with it the recognition of a law deeper than human ideas, in the very constitution of the world. This intuition, once gained in the domain of nature, was instinctively applied in the domain of æsthetics. The classical love of method had become almost a mode of thought. The scientific temper at once sanctioned and exalted it, bringing it into harmony with the formative principles of nature, and transforming the invention of

arbitrary rules into the recognition of eternal law. The exquisite elaboration of technique in our modern verse, far more its wide sanity, its constant self-mastery in form and substance, all witness to an instinct for artistic law, not so much classical, in either the ancient or the modern sense, as truly scientific. Our controlled poetic passion, obedient not to conventions or traditions, but to the inward laws of its own being, has a dignity all its own. And in such obedience to a principle of Law recognized as primordial and eternal, imagination finds its strength, its life, and its power to minister.

Passion for Fact.

If reverence for law deeper than that of the Augustan shapes our poetry, a passion for fact wider than that of the Elizabethan expands it. For the world is larger to-day than ever before. Our modern realism, offspring of science and democracy, has opened new artistic horizons, alike towards nature and society. Life is greater than art, and the world still waits its revealer. It is strange to realize how little, after all, is the vaunted achievement of the imagination. Shut off from consciousness for a moment the poetic work of the last century. Compare, then, the revelation of the world as we know it through that greatest poem, experience, with the written record of the poets. If they have given much, they have left far more unsaid, and their achievement, if unspeakably great, is also unspeakably little. The drama and the vision of even an aver-

age soul have never been fully given, not by Homer, not by Dante, not by Shakespeare. There were giants on the earth in those days, and they spoke with the tongues of giants. The elementary passions of men, from ambition to worship, are supremely revealed; but of the subtle play of character on character, of the delicate soul-experience that makes up the best of life, the most remains untold. The broad, simple, and universal aspects of nature are given us; but for the ocean, violet, and rose-pure under its cloud-shadows, for snowy peaks lifting white hands of intercession to the heavens, for the supreme glory and subtlest beauty of the world, we look in vain. Whole soul-epics are yet unwritten, and the full praise of nature is yet unsung.

The world still waits its revealer. Yet the modern poets, if smaller than the men of old, have none the less entered many a fair path before untrodden. The living nature revealed by Wordsworth and Shelley, the inner life revealed by Clough, Arnold, and Tennyson, the sphere of the grotesque swept within the kingdom of poetry by the audacious art of Browning, these are all foreign to the poets of the past. It is the passion for fact that gives them to us. For this passion, dangerous to art if for one moment divorced from profound reverence for law, grants, when thus purified and controlled, the very freedom of the earth to the imagination.

Striking in the conquest of new subjects for poetry, scientific realism works with yet more

keenness in the development of a more delicate perception. A marvelous feeling for detail marks our verse. Leading to a subtlety in psychological analysis hitherto unknown, this feeling is even more impressive in the treatment of nature.

Poetry, like science, has passed from the attitude that speculates to the attitude that observes. Already, early in the last century, Thompson, and later, Cowper, reacted from the generalized nature of the older poets, looked straight at the green earth, and told us what they saw there. But when poetry first began to appreciate the charms of observation it passed through a brief but curious phase. For a time it appreciated nothing else. The pseudo-scientific school at the close of the last century could see nothing in nature but an accumulation of details. Were the details sordid? No matter; there they were, and they should be described. Listen to Cowper, on the raising of cucumbers: —

> "The seed, selected wisely, plump and smooth
> And glossy, he commits to pots, of size
> Diminutive, well filled with well-preserved
> And fruitful soil, that has been treasured long,
> And drank no moisture from the dripping clouds.
> These on the warm and genial earth, that hides
> The smoking manure, and o'erspreads it all,
> He places lightly; and as Time subdues
> The rage of fermentation, plunges it
> In the soft medium," etc. [1]

It is as impossible to deny that this is scientific as to affirm that it is poetic. Poetry, however, soon

[1] *The Task*, III. 511–520.

recovered from this attack of literalism. It realized that its function was not to catalogue but to interpret, and that the power to transfigure was as necessary as the power to perceive.

From the time of Wordsworth, our modern poets give us objective truth lovingly, minutely, but always illumined by the imagination. Their wealth of knowledge and vitality of insight come out clearly in placing even fragments of their work beside fragments from those earlier times when conventionality and generalization prevail. Spenser, for instance, and Keats are twin spirits in æsthetic temperament. No one can read the "Faerie Queene," delighting in the exquisite fitness of setting, and deny that this poet of forest and ocean and garden and gay hillside dearly loved the outer world. Yet when he wants to tell us about a forest, a conventional description, time-worn with poetic service, is good enough for him.

> "Much can they praise the trees so straighte and hye,
> The sapling pine, the cedar proud and tall —
> The vine-propp'd elm, the poplar never dry,
> The builder oake, sole king of forests all,
> The aspen, good for staves; the cypress funerall," [1] etc.

Fancy the modern poet who should describe his trees as "straighte" and "hye." They are excellent words, and perfectly true; but there is about them something obvious which fails to appeal to the modern reader.

Keats has but one tree in his forest; and he gives the spirit of it, not by enumeration of

[1] *The Faerie Queene*, I. 1, *st.* 8.

details, but by grand imaginative grasp of the whole. Yet who can read the lines without feeling himself in the very presence of the hushed and dusky wood?

> "As when, upon a trancèd summer night,
> Those green-robed senators of mighty woods,
> Tall oaks, branch-charmèd by the earnest stars,
> Dream, and so dream all night without a stir,
> Save from one gradual solitary gust,
> Which comes upon the silence, and dies off
> As if the ebbing air had but one wave." [1]

Or, if one like to compare with Spenser a modern fragment in the enumerative method, take Wordsworth, with his

> "Tall ash-tree, sown by winds, by vapors nursed,
> In the dry crannies of the pendent rocks;
> Light birch, aloft upon the horizon's edge,
> A veil of glory for the ascending moon;
> And oak, whose roots by noontide dew were damped,
> And on whose forehead inaccessible
> The raven lodged in safety." [2]

Our development of specific detail grows more striking as we look more closely, and in narrower lines. Consider, for instance, the feeling for color. Take from Shelley the "moonlight colored cup" of his lily, with the "fiery star which is its eye;" from Tennyson the "rosy plumelets of the larch," the "laburnums, dropping-wells of fire," and "all the silvery gossamers that twinkle into green and gold," and see how life and interest vanish. A colorless world is as dreary in poetry as it would be in reality. Yet such a world in the main the early literatures give. Mr. Gladstone's

[1] *Hyperion*, I. 72–78. [2] *The Excursion*, Book VII.

curious hypothesis, which accounts for the complete absence of color epithets in Homer by supposing the old Greeks to have been color-blind, is familiar to all. Turning to the dawn of our own literature, we find in the frequent nature and armor descriptions of Beowulf scarcely a single color term, unless it be the strange "snake-colored" applied to a sword. In Chaucer, the next great representative poet, there is a certain change. That his perception of color was strong and true is obvious from such a vivid piece of work as the Cock in "The Nonne-priest's Tale," and from such bits as these in "The Knighte's Tale:" —

> "Emelie, that fairer was to seene
> Than is the lilie on her stalke greene,
> And fresher than the May with floures new,
> For with the rose-colour strof her hew" —
>
> "Of alabaster white, and red corall
> An oratorie, riche for to see."

But his evident appreciation only makes the customary absence of the color element more striking. Even in "The Knighte's Tale," where the treatment is purely pictorial, such passages as the above can be counted on one's fingers. In the Prologue there are but a half-dozen touches, each dismissed in a single word. The white and red embroidery of the Squire's tunic, the scarlet stockings of the Wife of Bath, the black beard of the Sompnour, are sharp, clear, and effective; but they are obvious and brief. The scale is limited to half a dozen full tones — scarlet, green, gold, and the

modifications of white. Half-tints are unknown, and subtle combinations do not exist. In the poets that follow Chaucer, the same deficiency is obvious. An occasional exquisite and natural touch makes us wonder all the more at the surrounding barrenness. Here, for instance, are two lines from that lovely poem, "The Flower and the Leafe," showing with what delicate feeling the poet had observed the translucent effect of little, new leaves against a bright sky.

> "Branches brode, laden with leves new,
> That sprongen out agen the sunne-schene,
> Some very red, and some a glad light greene."

But it is the only unconventional touch in the whole eighty-five stanzas, except the original simile applied to the grass: —

> "So small, so thicke, so shorte, so fresh of hue
> That most like unto greene wool, I woot, it was."

Glancing hastily through the later lyrists, we find the scale equally limited, the descriptive touches equally conventional and few. It is hard to believe, judging from this point alone, that these men ever looked straight at the shimmering hues of nature.

Rich, sensuous, impassioned, the Elizabethans leave on our minds a wealth of sumptuous imagery which criticism instinctively characterizes as "highly colored." But when we analyze this impression, and test it by specific reference, it evaporates mysteriously. Spenser is certainly the most prodigal author of the time. His very name calls to the mind a gorgeous and brilliant pageant.

But the means by which he produces this effect is certainly not through the use of color. His scale is the old conventional limited one; his allusions are few and commonplace. In the first book of the "Faerie Queene" there are only ten color epithets. His only really powerful work in this line is in the chiaroscuro of which he is a master.

If, then, in the magnificent style of the Elizabethans we find such poverty, it is obvious what we may expect from their successors. In the eighteenth century the world becomes cold as ice and gray as ashes. It is positively wan.

And now let us turn to our own time. Here is a stanza of Shelley's, chosen at random from "Prometheus Unbound," a stanza which will also illustrate the exquisite use of a scientific conception: —

> "As the dissolving warmth of dawn may fold
> A half-unfrozen dew-globe, green and gold,
> And crystalline, till it becomes a wingèd mist,
> And wanders up the vault of the blue day,
> Outlives the noon, and on the sun's last ray
> Hangs o'er the sea, a fleece of fire and amethyst."

We must not linger over the wealth of quotations that entice us. We can hardly open a page of modern descriptive poetry which is not aglow with rich color, or suffused with delicate, soft tints. The extension of the scale is no less remarkable than the frequency of its use; and the fine accuracy of discernment forms the most striking contrast to the broad, sparing touches of the elder poets. Here, for instance, is a bit from a poet of the second order, William Morris: —

"The sun is setting in the west; the sky
Is clear and hard, and no clouds come anigh
The golden orb, but further off they lie
Still-gray and black, with edges red as blood,
And underneath them is the weltering-flood
Of some huge sea, whose tumbling hills, as they
Turn restless sides about, are black or gray,
Or green, or glittering with the golden flame." [1]

The increased definiteness which we notice in this line is characteristic of all. It would be delightful to take up the treatment of form, of music, of a hundred phenomena; but we must content ourselves with a bare assertion, of which we have simply suggested the proof. Everywhere alike we should find our own poetry definite where the old is vague, detailed where the old is general. This, then, is the result of that new reverence for fact, introduced by natural science, which seemed at first sight so mournfully to have curtailed the possibilities of poetic work. It has enlarged the sphere of poetry by the introduction of a new world of subjects; it has trained the poetic vision to a delicacy of perception before unknown.

### 5. *Dangers and Safeguards.*

Thus in all directions we find that the change which has transfigured science has breathed also upon our modern poetry. We started with questioning the power of the imagination to assimilate the elements which form the scientific spirit; and our analysis has resulted in an answer to our question more satisfactory than we could possibly have

[1] *The Earthly Paradise. Ogier the Dane*, second section.

foretold. Science has turned the eyes of poetry from obedience to its own capricious fancy to the willing and joyful service of observed fact. The synthetic instinct of the imagination has been vindicated by the most recent and deepest discoveries of scientific law, so that poets hereafter may emphasize with a new assurance of truthfulness the interdependence of this complex universe. And the scientific belief in an ever active determining energy, working through every form of life, and sweeping all things forward, has touched with renovating power the very soul of modern imaginative thought. The formative ideas of science have exerted over our modern poetry an influence as widespread as it is profound.

Our chief question has thus been answered. But there is another, which must at least be definitely recognized before we close, though we can hardly award to it an adequate treatment. Our implied attitude has been throughout optimistic. We have spoken as if the sphere of poetry would be both enlarged and enriched by this new power. Is this inevitably true? Is the strong influence of science an unmixed good? If so, it is hard to account for the unreasoned convictions of people in general, and the opinion of some real thinkers, that the influence of science in literature is attended by serious dangers, which tend insidiously to destroy the life of poetry by robbing it of its characteristic powers. The dangers exist; no candid mind can ignore them; and their gravity is measured by the importance and vigor of their

causative principles. The idea of force may result in the mechanical fatalism which sees behind the whole phantasma of existence no loving Will, but an inert, impersonal power. The belief in the essential unity pervading nature may level down instead of up; failing to raise the natural to the level of the spiritual, it may drag the spiritual to the lower material plane, till the physical aspect of life engrosses attention, and soul is viewed as a function of automatically active matter. The love of fact and the habit of minute observation may fetter the imagination till it lose its glorious spontaneity and give place to an art sordid and confined.

These dangers are not only potential but actual. They have entered into the very depths of much of the poetry which already exists. Some of them are curiously exemplified in the school of poetry at the close of the last century, which dimly apprehended and mechanically rendered certain elements in the spirit which has produced our modern science. But much more strikingly in the poetry of our own generation do we find illustrations of them all. A dismal fatalism is a note that modern poetry too often repeats. In one form or another, it pervades much of our otherwise finest work. Sometimes the poet succumbs to it utterly, and his work is thereby rendered comparatively ineffective, whatever elements of power it contain. This is the case with Morris. Sometimes he struggles against it, and the strength of his conflict gives to his verse a vibrating vitality. This is the case

with Arnold, Tennyson, Clough, and hosts of others. Perhaps of all our modern poets, Browning is the only one completely free from this taint. The second tendency, to drag the spirit down, is too obvious to need more than a mention. The name of Swinburne is enough. As for the third danger, that the imagination may wither away, it is indirectly evident. Stupid poetry is not unknown among us; but we have nearly learned the lesson to-day that a versified enumeration of facts is non-poetic. Darwin's "Botanic Garden" and Fletcher's "Purple Island" are not works of this century; and the chief instance in English literature of just this sort of work is, curiously enough, the queer catalogues of Whitman. But the same conviction, that there is no longer any free scope for the imagination since its new material must be drawn from observed fact, is evident in the considerable and despondent school that utterly ignores subject, uses over and over again the old motifs, and devotes its entire attention to elaborating technique.

Fatalistic poetry, materialistic poetry, stupid poetry, — these are all to be found among us. We cannot deny that in a certain sense they are fostered by the principles of natural science. Where shall be our safeguard against them?

We must look for it, not without, but within. We find it in the eternal nature and function of true poetry. Science has nothing to say as to the nature of ultimate reality. In face of a materialistic interpretation on the one hand, and a spirit-

ual on the other, it remains entirely neutral. But the imagination is not neutral; it is a spiritual faculty. It exists only as it bears witness to the reality of the unseen; and so long as the spiritual world endures, it will continue to draw unfailing vigor from a source beyond itself. Viewed in the light of its calm assurance of unseen truth, the laws and ideas of which we have spoken become transfused with a spirit not their own. From a deadening they change to a life-giving influence. The passion for Fact can never result in the narrowing spirit of bald enumeration; for the function of the imagination is to interpret. Thus it rejoices in the inexhaustible material without, and submits itself with joyous and grateful humility to the study of the world of glowing wonder in which the soul of man is placed. The sense of Unity, finding its home and centre in faith, testifies to the infinite spiritual significance of every atom; thus it stands forth with absolute assurance as the guarantee against isolation, which is death. And the thought of omnipresent Force becomes to poetry a source of never-failing inspiration, hope and joy; for poetry knows that this Force is God.

"I have gone the whole round of Creation; I saw and I spoke!
I, a work of God's hand for that purpose, received in my brain
And pronounced on the rest of His handwork — returned Him again
His creation's approval or censure: I spoke as I saw, —
I report, as a man may, of God's work — All 's love, yet all 's law.
Now I lay down the judgment He lent me; each faculty tasked
To perceive Him, has gained an abyss, where a dewdrop was asked.

Have I knowledge? Confounded it shrivels at wisdom laid bare.
Have I forethought? How purblind, how blank, to the Infinite Care.
Do I task any faculty highest, to image success?
I but open my eyes — and perfection, no more and no less,
In the kind I imagined, full-fronts me, and God is seen God
In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and the clod.
And thus looking within and around me, I ever renew,
With that stoop of the soul which in bending upraises it too,
The submission of Man's nothing perfect to God's all complete,
As by each new obeisance in Spirit I rise to His feet." [1]

[1] Browning: *Saul.*

## II

### WORDSWORTH AND THE NEW DEMOCRACY

THE high excitement of a new ideal and a cause to win is largely gone from the scientific movement. But the march of democracy is only just begun, and the fervor of unfought battles yet hovers about its disciples. Understood and in fair measure applied as a political theory, it still waits realization as a social faith or an industrial solution; and the art shaped by its full power is the art of the future. Exponent of the new order.

Yet democracy in its mighty childhood controlled of course the English poets from Blake to Shelley. Our later Victorians have ceased to chant the praises of liberty and fraternity, not because the words have grown meaningless, but because as they have passed into the stage of slow, pathetic realization, their poetical value has become indirect. But the men of the century's early prime beheld a new vision; and the record of the vision is the poetry of the age.

Two poets, supremely, reflect this vision for us — Wordsworth and Shelley. In their large and lovely work, all its lineaments are imaged, and it is hard to tell which great spirit gives it more perfectly. Wordsworth is as yet, however, far less

trusted and understood, in this aspect. Nor can we wonder. For he turned Tory in middle life; and the ardent young champions of the Social Democracy are inclined to despise him nowadays as a lost leader, while they lavish all their honor on the flame-like loyalty of Shelley.

Nevertheless, take him for all in all, in his spiritual history as well as his poetic achievement, Wordsworth is probably a better exponent than Shelley of the democratic ideal in all its length and breadth. In spite of "The Warning," his conservatism was pure matter of surface opinion. He grew despondent over the political tendencies of the day; but his very despondency, however misguided, had its deep source in the love of the common people. The radiance of his democratic faith did indeed as he grew older fade into the light of common day; yet those first affections, those shadowy recollections of a divine glory once shed on human life, remained to the end the master-light of all his seeing, a power to cherish and to uphold. His poetry made incursions into stupid regions as he grew older, and we miss the old concentrated intensity of phrase. But through mistaken dissertations on politics, as through his glorified contemplation of human life, pulses the same unwavering interest and faith in men and women as they are.

Wordsworth is indeed chiefly great as the high priest of the new democracy. His message from nature is wonderful, but his message from humanity is more profound. It is "thanks to the human

heart by which we live," that to him "the meanest flower that blows can give thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears." His finer poems all flash upon our nerves the thrill of imaginative awe in the presence of a flesh-clad spirit. It is his love of man, constant from first to last, that makes him a spiritual power.

Wordsworth is not the most intense genius among the great revolutionary poets, but he is the largest man. He could understand his time better than Shelley for two reasons; he had more sanity, and he knew a more varied development.

Sanity is the finest thing in the world, next to passion. A perfect poet must have both, and this is how Æschylus and Shakespeare are perfect. Sanity is sometimes the stronger force; it was so with Goethe. Sometimes passion is the stronger; it was so with Shelley, as with most poets of the revolution. Wordsworth unites them. His passion is always controlled by his sanity, and in the poems by which he chiefly lives, his sanity is pervaded by his passion.

It is true, of course, that much of Wordsworth's poetry is too sane to be interesting, for sanity lingered when passion had either died, or sunk below speech. Yet sanity even by itself is not to be despised. Wordsworth is one of the poets who are valuable not only by inspiration but by ideas, not only by vision but by experience. It is easy enough, with Matthew Arnold, to make fun of his didacticism, yet he is a real intellectual force. His entire product carries weight as the direct and

sincere expression of the effect on a strong man of a great historic period.

Add the recognition that Wordsworth was writing from 1789 to 1850, a period of sixty years, the most significant in modern history. He did not simply flash the light of his imagination on one great idea. He grew up with the revolution and survived it, and knew in life or rendered in art all its successive phases. Surely it is reasonable, then, to claim him as the widest exponent of the early democratic movement. It is the very change in his outlook, a change marked indeed, which gives to his work, taken as a whole, peculiar significance. But to see how this is so, how his poetry, in its successive phases, is our most suggestive exponent of the slow historic revolution, we must study from first to last the story of his development.

"Lyrical Ballads," and its promise.

It is always worth while to linger over the starting-point of a poet's work. This comes, with Wordsworth, just at the end of the eighteenth century. In 1798, he and Coleridge published the tiny volume of "Lyrical Ballads."

This little book was to the poetic revolution what the taking of the Bastille was to the historic movement: shock, challenge, manifesto. It was far more than this: it was the prophecy of the poetic achievement of an epoch. In that sad and obscure decade, as in a dark night, shrouded by storm-cloud, the poems shine like a pure, faint

line of distant sky, holding the promise of the coming day. All the phases of modern poetry are suggested by them, — romanticism, alike external and spiritual, raised to the highest power in "The Ancient Mariner;" unflinching studies of bare fact in "Animal Tranquillity and Decay," and the little peasant-poems; poetry of mystical and philosophical contemplation in "Tintern Abbey." Romantic verse, realistic verse, reflective verse, — these were the three chief forms which our modern poetry was to develop. Much of Wordsworth's most exquisite work is in this little volume, work supreme in exalted simplicity, instinct with the buoyant, delicate vigor of a youth intensely sensitive yet ascetically pure.

"Lyrical Ballads" distills youthfulness; yet its authors were not very young. Keats at twenty-four had flung his passionate life away in song and love, Shelley at twenty-eight had but two more years to live, and Shelley and Keats alike take the world into their boyish confidence and grow up in public. Not so their more reticent elder brother. Wordsworth was twenty-eight when he published "Lyrical Ballads." "Tintern Abbey" alone is enough to show us that the book is no outcome of earliest youth.

Traces of a present struggle are indeed to be found in these pages. In the poem, "The Female Vagrant," still more in that curious drama, "The Borderers," an attempt now read only from literary interest, we have a glimpse of a strange Wordsworth morbid and depressed, weighed down

by the sorrows of life, drawn towards a diseased introspection and a study of psychological anomalies. In place of simplicity and serenity we have subtlety and unanswered questioning. The poems are still in the shadow of the agnosticism of disillusion. It is curious to read them, and to remember that many years later a Victorian poet was to resume the effort early abandoned by Wordsworth, to dwell with almost pathological interest upon the abnormal manifestations of character, and to adopt the dramatic rather than the contemplative method. But the century had a great deal to say before it was ready for a Browning. Wordsworth's false start was soon forgotten, even by himself, and he first gained the ear of the public and found his own soul in poetry simple as eternal childhood is simple, wise with the deep wisdom of utter peace.

But it is the peace of conquest, gravely pure. The light of spiritual victory, hardly won, rests upon it. All the early poems of Wordsworth shine with the radiance of a faith which has passed through death to victory and knows the glory of the Resurrection. It is impossible to describe the atmosphere of these brief, limpid, perfect poems — poems where a purely spiritual lustre seems to blend with the quiet light of common dawn. They are the expression of emotion recollected or better re-collected, in tranquillity. Their very simplicity, deeply sympathetic with the heart of childhood, is not of the natural child. It belongs to the new birth, the childhood of the

Kingdom of Heaven. The contrast is evident, if we put beside Blake's "Infant Joy," — the pure stammer of a natural baby, — Wordsworth's "We are Seven," — the tender bending of a soul that has suffered over the innocence of a child soul outside the ken of loss or pain. A chastened spirit, austere though youthful still, here speaks to us; and the buoyancy and living joy of the poetry are all the clearer because they shine through the limpid purity of lingering tears.

It is the faith in the new democracy that gives to the book its deepest pathos and fullest power. Symbolically rendered as a universal principle in "The Ancient Mariner," this faith appears simple, earnest, and concrete in Wordsworth's studies of human life. Such brooding love of primal humanity is of an order never known before. The earlier dramatic method, the satiric method of the last century, are both as strange to the young Wordsworth as our own method of peering self-analysis. His attitude is all his own, a tender, reverent, direct contemplation of essential man. The old beggar and the child are his chosen subjects; creatures in whom not only interest of situation but interest of character have vanished or are reduced to lowest terms. Wordsworth watches from a distance which softens all that is distinctive into one common type, and blends the figure into unity with the wide world around. For it is man stripped more utterly than even Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh of all vesture of circumstance, who is dear to his spirit; man in whom the simple fact

of absolute humanity shines forth in sacredness naked and supreme.

No boy could thus have written of human life. Wordsworth, when he wrote these poems, had known a great and definite experience. The passion, the tumult, the struggle of his life lay behind him and not before.

The Experience of Wordsworth a Prophetic Summary.

It is the fashion to talk as if Wordsworth had always lived in a passionless seclusion, untroubled by the storms of deed. Such was the choice of his manhood; it was not the fate of his youth. At the most sensitive age, from nineteen to twenty-two, he lived through a tremendous drama. The "Lyrical Ballads" were written seven years after this experience had come to an end. Another seven years, and Wordsworth told us, in "The Prelude," the whole story. As we read the controlled and lofty verse, we see out of how great a struggle was wrested the peace of his poems. We see also how large and sane was his nature, and how significant, in relation to the whole movement of the times, is the movement of his soul. From the deep quietude of mountain-heights, and the tranquil routine of an English university, to the French Revolution, with its hopes, its horrors, its despair! What transition could be sharper than that, what experience more dramatic? Wordsworth did not simply listen to the echoes of the Revolution from afar. He was living in France during its crucial years, living among men, some

of them his dearest friends, to whom it was matter of life, sometimes, alas! of death. To no English boy, certainly to no English poet, had such an experience ever been vouchsafed. The experience was public, not private; but to a peculiarly excitable and selfless temperament, like that of Wordsworth, such an experience is far more poignant than any personal struggle, unshared by the common soul. We see, not only in "The Prelude," but in allusions to the very end of his life, what it all meant to him; how in this period was concentrated his soul-drama, how the outer movement of the revolution was accompanied by a spiritual experience of sharp transitions and agonizing problems in his young, poetic soul.

His experience, as nobly described in "The Prelude," is of deep interest in relation to his own later development; from the violent changes of this period he emerged with firm convictions, never to be changed again. But the record has an interest even greater in relation to the development of the poetic imagination during the whole century, under the influence of democratic ideas.

For Wordsworth, as his life-history blended with that terrible drama, and finally passed into the peace beyond, was a prophet of the age to come. The different phases of modern thought and modern struggle find an epitome in advance in his experience. The more one reads "The Prelude," the more impressive grows not only the sense of the deep life which preceded his poetry, but the conviction of his representative character. In

each stage through which he passes he is the prototype of some later poet, who stays in the region of thought which Wordsworth leaves behind.

At first, the future poet of humanity was very indifferent to man. He tells us that even the revolution did not arouse him. It was art and romance which thrilled his soul, — a "painted Magdalen," a castle, or an abbey, dreams of olden knights in the forest. This was a brief phase with Wordsworth; it may recall the brief life of Keats, to whom only a thing of beauty was a joy forever.

Soon he awakened. The revolution entered his soul, in its earliest phase of rapture, hope, and love. His heart was all given to the People, and his love was theirs. He shared the touching superficiality of the time; its unreasoning dependence upon reason, its cry for a return to nature, its large ideals and buoyant, excited optimism.

Wordsworth knew this experience well; but it was not to be his home. Probably it was at this time that he was drawn towards anarchical ideas. He tells us how pure individualism attracted him, how he dreamed of a society, ruled by instinct, where all restraints of law should be rejected, and man be "lord of himself in undisturbed delight." He passed through these conceptions in thought; it was not for him to realize them in poetry. The poet of Prometheus, not the poet of the Peddler, chants the pæan of man "king over himself." Shelley in his exquisite youth caught the fugitive light of the revolutionary vision, with its large

and nebulous glory. He never, like Wordsworth, passed beyond it; he preserved it for us, eternal.

But the revolution did not pause. It hurried forward, and Wordsworth with it, out from the light of dawn into a horror of great darkness. The confusion and despair of the Reign of Terror the poet touches but lightly, yet he lets us see how it haunted him by night, although sternly repressed by day. In the melodramatic and material agony of that tempestuous moment, we may catch at least a suggestion of a Zeitgeist akin to that of Byron.

And here, the drama of Wordsworth's life separated itself from that of the time, and became purely interior and spiritual. He grew indifferent to general hopes and the movement of the outer deed. To find a parallel to the next phase in his history, we must pass from the poets directly formed by the revolution to those of a later age. It is Arnold and Clough, not Shelley and Byron, to whom Wordsworth now becomes akin. For, outwearied by passion, he sinks back into subtle and despairing thought. A profound skepticism invades him; he becomes agnostic as to God and man. Dragging all questions, metaphysical and moral, to the bar of the reason, denying soon in hushed, frightened silence the validity of that reason itself, the disease of the century is upon him, the spirit of analysis that leads to despair. How many a later poet has known this experience, and has mourned with Wordsworth in the supreme spiritual agony, — "A sense, deathlike, of treach-

erous desertion, felt in that last place of refuge, his own soul!"

Many of our modern poets have paused in this doleful region. Not so Wordsworth. He passed slowly through it, to tranquillity and restored cheer. His nature, sane and strong, conquered at last its heritage of faith. To this conquest he was helped by many agencies. The dispassionate study of natural science began the cure; it was continued by the tender ministries of his sister and of nature, and completed in his renewed love for real men and women and his deepened reverence for human life in the concrete. As we read the serene Wordsworth of the poems, we have a prophecy of our latest experience. His emphasis on a divine order foreshadows to us the subdued but steadfast faith of Tennyson; his deep conviction of the sacredness of separate lives leads the way to the spirit and method of Browning. Thus does the spiritual experience of Wordsworth give us a prophetic summary of the whole sequence of our poets.

Loyalty and despondency.

Only, then, when spiritual victory had been won and conviction gained, did Wordsworth enter upon his poetic career. He had left behind the happy, passionate generalizations which belonged to the early revolution; he had left behind also the disillusionment and world-sickness of a later time. It is because these things were so fully known to his life that we claim him as a complete exponent of democracy,

not because they are reflected, as present passion, in his poetry. His artistic starting-point is that of the second, modern period of democracy in which we still live.

And so, from his very earliest poems, Wordsworth's faith differs from that of the revolution.

> "Past and Future are the wings
> On whose support, harmoniously conjoined,
> Moves the great Spirit of human knowledge," [1]

he exclaims, in a fine figure. We may truly say that his ideal is not revolution, but evolution along historic lines. Moreover, he always clung to the religious basis of democracy. It is "in God's pure sight" that "monarch and peasant" are to be "equalized;" because we are all "children of the God in heaven," he believes in the brotherhood of man. He always retained a deep and tranquil reverence for the faith of the simple people. His faith, indeed, was one with theirs, and herein he was a better democrat than any skeptical son of the revolution, or metaphysical pantheist, like Shelley. For he never knew the worldly and tyrannical Church of the cities, from which the revolution revolted. He loved the little village church of his boyhood, the snow-white Lady, sitting on her hills above the lake; and through the tender studies of the churchyard among the Mountains in "The Excursion," on to the dreary yet devout ecclesiastical sonnets, his loyalty never wavered; but the Church in which his deep affection centred was that around which gathered the

[1] *The Prelude*, Book VI.

life of the poor. Lastly, Wordsworth's conception of freedom always divided him from the revolution proper. He loved Liberty with a passionate love, but it was liberty founded upon law. Only for an instant, as we saw, was his thought touched by anarchy, and this instant led him to temporary despair. An unchartered freedom tired him. He felt the weight of those chance desires which Shelley longed to see masters of human life. The "Ode to Duty" is an early poem, but it emphasizes the sacredness of Law as forcibly as those later lines which bid us

> "Be thankful, even when tired and faint,
> For the rich bounties of restraint." [1]

His conception was not mechanical nor political. It was organic and spiritual. A nation, to him, was not an aggregate of independent units; it was a living whole.

> "As leaves are to the tree whereon they grow
> And wither, every human generation
> Is to the Being of a mighty Nation," [2]

he cried. And he is sure to the end, that no effort after liberty can prosper which does not spring from a spiritual ideal: —

> "Nor yet,
> (Grave this within thy heart!) if spiritual things
> Be lost, through apathy, or scorn, or fear,
> Shalt thou thy humbler franchises support,
> However hardly won or justly dear, —
> What came from heaven, to heaven by nature clings,
> And, if dissevered thence, its course is short." [3]

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[1] *The Pass of Kirkstone* (1817). [2] *At Bologna* (1837).
[3] *Ecclesiastical Sonnets.* Part III. Sonnet x.

Such a passage shows the poet heart-loyal, in his last years, to the high dreams of his youth.

Wordsworth's central convictions, then, never alter. From his twenty-fifth year, they hold conservative elements, born of his great struggle; in his sixtieth year, he is true to his love of freedom.

Yet we all know how painful a change passes over his later poetry. He loses his buoyancy; and the loss is fatal to his inspiration. The earlier poems, from 1798 to 1806, are full of springing life. Like the pan-pipes of Keats, their unheard melodies are the sweetest. Not audible to the sensual ear, they pipe to the spirit, ditties of no tone. In the later poems, this mysterious music has vanished. Wise thought is left, and dignified, graceful verse, but the magic has fled.

Now this loss of buoyancy is largely coincident with a change of poetic subject.

Wordsworth had been restored to sanity and joy by turning from philosophical radicalism and dreams of an ideal society to the contemplation of men, women, and children. He translated his democracy from public to private life. For twelve years, he loved human beings and his poetry revealed them. Then came a change. Slowly he turned away, and his thought was drawn more and more to public life and public questions. "The Excursion" is the transition poem between the two periods. Nearly all its poetic value is found in the grave, tender, simple stories of village life, in Books VI. and VII. The discussions of Factories, of Education, of Church and State, in the

other books, have a genuine value to thought which has not been sufficiently recognized, but they are unspeakably dreary to the imagination. As Wordsworth insisted on writing about the Ballot, and Steamboats, and Capital Punishment, his work became heavier and heavier. "Peter was dull, so very dull," as the irreverent Shelley cried.

Yet public questions can be treated with imaginative fire. Shelley so treated them, and Wordsworth's own early sonnets on politics have the inspired ring. If his later poetry is dull, it is because it is sorrowful. The prophet poets thrive on sorrow. It took Dante the exile to give us a "Divine Comedy." But Wordsworth is no prophet. Like Emerson, he is a seer, and the seer nature is unable to brook the pressure of a present sorrow. Quietude of spirit is essential to his vision. Such quietude, in the interior life, he maintained to the end. Among his woods and waters he lived, after he was thirty, an intensely recollected life, that recalls his own lines, —

> "With heart as calm as lakes that sleep
> In frosty moonlight glistening,
> Or mountain rivers where they creep
> Along a channel smooth and deep
> To their own far-off murmurs listening." [1]

Only when he turned to the public questions of the day did his high serenity fail him. Looking out upon national life, his spirit was oppressed, and the oppression was fatal to his poetry. The seeming movement of the times outraged his sensi-

[1] *Memory* (1823).

bilities, offended his convictions, and destroyed his peace. "He grew old in an age he condemned," and the dark prophetic mantle of his later years weighed heavily upon his singing-robes and shrouded them from sight.

Wordsworth and Social Democracy.

Wordsworth was a sorrowful man, for he was ill at ease in his own generation. But before we condemn his sorrow as the mournful, instinctive cry of the natural conservative, we must look at the generation.

Wordsworth's mature years covered the first half of the nineteenth century. We can see as we look back that this period had a sharp character of its own. It was the heyday of individualism, in politics and industry. The modern world, with its vast material civilization, its congestion into cities, its ever-widening separation between classes, was swiftly crowding the old world out of sight. In politics, the best the time had to show was a mild Whiggery and the impulse of laissez-faire. Machinery was supplanting hand-labor: a new industrial system, marked by fierce, almost unchecked competition, was the order of the day. "Our age is mechanical," wrote Carlyle, in 1833.

Such was the epoch on which the poet of the "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality" looked forth; a period of curious barrenness, spiritual and æsthetic, coming between the marvelous and fecund spirituality of the revolution and the spirituality, perhaps deeper because more intellectual and more practical, of the later Victorian age.

Small wonder that Wordsworth, child of the spiritual revolution, was exile in this shallow age! The poet of "The Prelude" could be only a pilgrim in a time which bowed down before the material sublime in the poetry of Byron, before political complacency in the career of Macaulay, before religious respectability in the Bishops of the Established Church. Wordsworth's conscience and his imagination alike revolted. His conscience held firmly that national liberty should be founded upon the moral law: he saw it founded on what Carlyle a little later called the Law of the Shoptill. His imagination clung reverently to the inheritance of the past, and the dignity of simple life; he found traditions scorned, and simplicity replaced by luxury. As soon as he turned from private to public themes, he became wretched. He hated the tendencies of the age, he execrated its reforms.

Before his death in 1850, the tide, as we now know, began to turn. Far below the surface, it set in the thirties towards a deeper religion, in the late forties towards a new social ideal. But the change came too late for the old poet to note it. The world, political and social, was as he saw it given over to materialism. His discomfort brought him not only to a sweeping antagonism to the present, but to a harsh judgment on those hopes of the past which had lured people forth into this evil country. We all know how political conservatism grew on him in his later days; how he disliked the "Power, misnamed the Spirit of Reform," opposed

the Reform Bill of '32, stood up for the old Poor Law, and, in a very bad sonnet, called the ballot a "pest." With the England of his own day he was thoroughly out of touch. Small wonder that he thought himself an out and out Tory, and that other people thought him so too.

Yet with the genuine Tory position, Wordsworth, in the vital portions of his thought, had almost nothing in common. A reaction was at hand. The "progressive" ideas of the Whigs of 1830 were to become, in the next generation, the stronghold of conservatism, and the beliefs of the old recluse of the Lakes come curiously near, in certain ways, to the present battle-cry of the sons of the future.

Wordsworth's politics are of course Tory,—Tory unmitigated, Tory conventional. But we have learned to-day that there is a region of thought on public matters far more important than politics, the region of sociology. It is here that his thought is startling. For the meek inherit the earth, in his poetry. His opinions changed, his mood varied, his ideas on public political questions of the day were often foolish enough. But that great faith which is permanent in his work makes for pure democracy. This faith is perhaps more of a passion in the early work, of a conviction in the later; but it never wavers. From that noble moment in his youth when "his heart was all given to the People, and his love was theirs," he belonged, to use Lincoln's fine phrase, to the plain people. He not only praised Poverty, he

practiced it. His respect for it was a deep belief. He would have liked to see all men

> "Breathing in content
> The keen, the wholesome air of Poverty,
> And drinking from the well of homely life." [1]

The Return to the People, that latest cry of the reformer, sounds loud and clear through the poetry of Wordsworth. Whether this Tolstóy cry will ever prove the salvation of the people we cannot say; at least, however, many are proving it, in practical experience, the solution of their artificial miseries. "Plain living and high thinking:" the phrase has passed into a proverb; and like many a proverb becomes a bore to thought while not yet a blessing to practice. Wordsworth first uttered the words in an age intoxicated and stifled by mere wealth; he would hardly take them back to-day. He sought from the first, not indeed absolute equality between man and man — such a Utopia never entered his head — but a voluntary return on the part of all right-minded people towards simplicity of life. He deeply honored the development of the great, simple, basal virtues among the poor; patience, integrity, the deep affection in all normal ties. Further, he honored work. Even manual work he believed to be consistent with culture and deep thought; and here again he comes near to Tolstóy. In his reverence for the productive laborer as part of the sad yet healthful order of nature itself, he is like Millet; and his many visions, the Reaper, the Leech-gatherer, the Shep-

[1] *The Excursion*, Book I.

herd, with their exquisite dignity seem to find comment and realization at once in the pictures of the French artist. The same wide and tender space broods over their figures; the same elemental and typical grandeur belongs to them; they exhale the same sense of being not artificial products of processes apart from nature, but a necessary portion of the divine activity of the world. But Wordsworth came before Millet. Never before had the Laborer been thus treated, never before had unaristocratic toil been so glorified. The choice of the Peddler as the hero of "The Excursion" was in itself a revolutionary manifesto of democratic feeling. We see how alien such a choice was to the Zeitgeist as we find Lamb, after a comically lame defense of his friend's action, suggesting with apparent seriousness that all those to whom the word "peddler" is offensive may in their own mind substitute "palmer" or "pilgrim," and so keep the poetic harmonies complete.

As Wordsworth grows older, he grows, as we have seen, more sorrowful, and his attitude has less of sentiment, more of specific conviction. His despondency grows almost tragic when we realize how hard he strove to sustain the resolute cheerfulness demanded by his creed. He was no Byron, to court effective agony.

> "It were a wanton thing, and would demand
> Severe reproof, if we were men whose hearts
> Could hold vain dalliance with the misery
> Even of the dead." [1]

[1] *The Excursion*, Book I.

The heart of Lucy's poet never held vain dalliance with misery. Yet his later poetry, in which he treats of national and public life, is invaded by gray sorrow. The light of the imagination is hidden by a thick mist of unillumined tears. Nevertheless, a landscape is often seen most truthfully when the dazzle of the sunlight is veiled; and Wordsworth's deep convictions, permanent in their main features, can be learned with peculiar clearness from his sombre later poems.

Wordsworth and Modern Industry.

He had always deep sympathy with the sorrows and wrongs of the poor. This sympathy is the first expression of his genius in his earliest poem, "Guilt and Sorrow;" it remains, intensified if anything, to the very end. The Story of Margaret in "The Excursion," Book I., is a good central example of it. But in later life the feeling deepens, and becomes more and more modern, till Wordsworth's voice becomes almost like that of a latter-day reformer. For he turns away from the thought of the peasant to the thought of the artisan and the mechanic, and the wrongs which oppress and sadden his serene old age are those which spring from the present industrial system. The ninth book of "The Excursion" gives us an attack, carefully controlled but deeply felt, on the result of the modern manufactory; and it is evident from the whole course of Wordsworth's later writing how sorrowfully his mind was overcast by the recognition of the vast mechanical civilization that was rising up around him founded on compe-

tition. He hated it for two reasons. First was its encouragement of the greed for wealth. He has a strong description of a factory, devoted to the worship of "Gain, the master idol of these realms." He believed that with the introduction of machinery and the multiplication of luxuries, peace, reverence, and domestic virtue were fast vanishing from sight. Then he disliked the new system because it was unjust to the workman. Wordsworth was one of the first, perhaps the very first, to note the slavery of the wage-earner under the new system. This is startling, but it is true. His deep sympathy with the oppressed, his insight into present problems, sound through the poem "Humanity," a prosaic but vigorous piece of writing, dated 1829. "Shall man assume a property in man?" he cries, and goes on to attack the sentimental horror of distant slavery of the negro on the part of men who live and fatten on the profit from the masses of white slaves toiling at their feet. He is at times amazingly modern: —

> "Qualified oppression, whose defense
> Rests on a hollow plea of recompense,"

is pretty strong language for the present system of wages. The lines might well be quoted by a fin de siècle agitator in Hyde Park. The enthusiasm for political liberty seemed to him hollow and sentimental. He hated to hear people even talk of Liberty, while all the time, under an individualistic régime, hosts of Englishmen were gripped in the chains of industrial slavery, changed into mere

machines for material production, and doomed to lingering death of intellect and soul.

There is an indignant and eloquent description of the boy-operative in the eighth book of "The Excursion:"—

> "Oh! banish far such wisdom as condemns
> A native Briton to these inward chains. . . .
> He is a slave to whom release comes not
> And cannot come. . . .
> His raiment, whitened o'er with cotton-dust
> Or locks of wool, announces whence he comes. . . .
> The limbs increase: but liberty of mind
> Is gone forever."

These vivid lines lead to a discussion of the whole Problem of Poverty. Wordsworth evidently feels that the praises of poverty in his early work may to some people seem inconsistent with his present tone. He indignantly replies that the poverty of the agricultural poor is often a spiritual discipline and a real blessing. It is normal, peaceful, and consistent with full liberty of soul. The poverty of the mechanic, on the other hand, the workman of the cities, destroys freedom, inner and outward alike. It is stunting to body and degrading to soul. Wordsworth is very forcible on all these points. Especially is he roused to anger by the thought of the early employment of children. It is touching to find the poet, who in earlier years had revealed the sacred pathos of childhood and the glory of infancy, pleading with grave earnestness the cause of the factory child. The cottager, he says, has at least been permitted to enjoy the dawn; but the artisan child of the city

is cut off from babyhood from the joy of the world.

We are ready now to understand Wordsworth's alleged conservatism. It is his indignation against the industrial system around him which really gives the key to his contempt for current politics.

As for escape towards a better order, Wordsworth, poet not statesman, has little definite to offer. He was no Shelley, to be content with abstract ideals of a regenerate earth. Neither did he belong to our more recent age, when the highest imagination and purest idealism are devoting themselves to schemes of practical reform. He grieved at

> "the injustice which hath made
> So wide a barrier between man and man."

He longed passionately for a deeper sympathy between classes; not from the somewhat arrogant, if philanthropic, desire for the good of the poor, but from clear and humble insight into the needs of the rich. He wished for a stronger emphasis on Government, if only Government could be wise; and he wished it to take hold of education and at least to some extent to control industry. He was eager in his demand for state education, to give all a fairer chance, that none need be forced

> "To drudge through a weary life without the help
> Of intellectual implements and tools,
> A savage horde among the civilized,
> A servile band among the lordly free." [1]

[1] *The Excursion*, Book IX.

Curiously enough, he believed in the principle of Trades Unions, though he feared their excesses. In a note on the Poor Law Act, postscript to an edition of his poems of 1835, he indorses the principle, and pleads for the formation of joint-stock companies among the laboring class. In times of crisis, he demanded state employment for the workman. He says, in support of this demand: "It is broadly asserted by many that every man who endeavors to find work *may* find it; were this assertion verified, there would still remain a question, what kind of work, and how far may the laborer be fit for it?" He goes on to say that men adapted to fine manual work should not be put, for instance, in times of stress, to stone-cutting, — an idea which we in these later times might well afford to consider. But Wordsworth's most startling plea, reiterated again and again, was for a principle not only ignored at the high tide of competition, but subversive of all the orthodox political economy of his day. For he pleaded that, in the conduct of industry, the welfare of the workman be taken into account as well as the profit to the employer or the cheapness of the product. The sacrifice of the joy of life, the loss to thousands, under the present industrial system, of their human birthright, is to him monstrous, and he exclaims: —

> "Our life is turned
> Out of her course whenever man is made
> An offering or a sacrifice, a tool
> Or implement, a passive thing, employed

> As a brute mean, without acknowledgment
> Of common right or interest in the end;
> Used or abused as selfishness may prompt." [1]

He is full of scorn for the fallacy that such abuse of the individual man and woman, and such rank injustice, could ever be for the advantage of the whole: —

> "Economists will tell you that the State
> Thrives by the forfeiture, — unfeeling thought
> And false as monstrous. Can the mother thrive
> By the destruction of her innocent sons
> In whom a premature necessity
> Blocks out the forms of nature, preconsumes
> The reason, famishes the heart, shuts up
> The infant Being in itself, and makes
> Its very spring a season of decay?
> The lot is wretched, the condition sad,
> Whether a pining discontent survive
> And thirst for change; or habit hath subdued
> The soul depressed, dejected even to love
> Of her close tasks and long captivity." [2]

Nothing could be clearer. Wordsworth demands that, whether by state action or the gradual development of a higher moral standard, industry be so regulated that the workman be set free.

Looking at Wordsworth's entire message, the conviction comes to us, almost with a shock of surprise, that he was a pioneer of modern thought. The respectable liberalism of his day would have been outraged had it been capable of understanding the trend of his message; the most advanced thought of this latest

Wordsworth and Carlyle.

[1] *The Excursion*, Book IX. [2] *Ibid.* Book VIII.

hour hails that message as prophetic still. He was a political aristocrat; but he was a social radical. He defied all the party labels of his time. The young reformers who despise him as Tory and formalist, because of his hatred of the political gospel of his day, really hate what he hated, and, in great measure at least, love what he loved. For he saw that democracy and freedom, if they are to be sincere, must be extended (sometimes one is almost afraid that he said to himself transferred) from the region of politics to the social and industrial sphere. It was because of their failure to effect this extension that he branded the tendencies of his time with scorn, and reacted from them in sorrow.

Recall his central cries; his constant appeal from the Public to the People; his plea for a voluntary simplicity of life; his deep reverence for productive toil and for the laboring man; his hatred of individualism in politics and competition in industry. What place had a thinker of this order in a period of which the most popular exponent was Lord Macaulay? Like all individual thinkers, Wordsworth was solitary in his thought. He had little in common with the men of genius of his time, with Shelley or Byron; he had even less in common with the men of letters like Jeffrey, or with the statesmen, like Brougham or Peel.

And yet, had he but known it, — as he never did, — there was close to him during all his later years a man whose whole thought, especially on social lines, was curiously like his own; who like

him hated the party of progress in his own day and deeply reverenced the historic past, yet, like him, went far deeper than technical conservatism, down into depths of thought where surged ideas subversive of the whole social order. No men could differ more widely in temperament and in gospel than Carlyle and Wordsworth. Carlyle thought Wordsworth a narrow prig, and the poet of the Lakes apparently never read a word from the prophet of Ecclefechan; yet in their thought about human life, the two honest spirits arrived by different paths at much the same results.

They have an equal horror of a civilization founded on wealth; and the hatred of shams, if less vociferous in the poet, is no less positive. They hold the same attitude towards the modern manufacturing system and its effect on the workman; they agree in honor for the plain people and the integrity of toil; and voice the same cry for simplification of life. Their very religion is not unlike in central passion; the exalted pantheism of "Sartor Resartus" is not far from the note of "Tintern Abbey," and in both writers pantheism is joined to a stern faith in the moral law and the righteousness of the divine order. It is perhaps their religion which led them both to that conception of society as an organic and spiritual whole, so vital in each, so foreign to the individualism of the day. To realize such society, both emphasize the functions of government, and fervently demand an Aristocracy of Worth. Alike in strength, they are alike in what seems to us

weakness, a distrust of the political democracy. Such distrust leads to the phases of their work which we would fain forget; to the worship of brute force in Carlyle, and the institutional formalism of Wordsworth.

Neither radical nor conservative, as the time understood such terms, the positive thought of Wordsworth was traveling straight in the direction of Carlyle's; away from all the popular theories of the day. But while the lines of conviction run parallel, the lines of feeling intersect. Carlyle's theoretic reverence for the past did not prevent him from seeking to slip it off like an outworn garment. To Wordsworth, the institutions of the past still held true life, which could be fanned to vigor once more. Their chief difference belonged to their times as much as to their personalities. Carlyle is the prophet of work, Wordsworth the high priest of tranquillity; the one is the man of action, the other of contemplation. It is largely because Wordsworth is purely contemplative that he suffered so much in later years; for action is the only mode of joy in evil days. But he never saw this. His one demand was for serenity, his one impulse to flee the evil,

> "Which he must bear, being powerless to redress."

In a fine sonnet called "Retirement," written in 1827, he defends his position: it is the position of a man awakened to behold, but not aroused to act. For Carlyle's bitter soul there is no serenity: his one impulse is to fight till death. In Wordsworth,

the century is becoming aware of a great evil, but is not yet ready for the attack; in Carlyle, the forces are mustered and the battle-cry sounds clear.

Wordsworth, Ruskin, and Morris.

Contemplative and poetic, the seer of the English Lakes differs indeed widely from the fiery prophet of Chelsea. The convictions are the same, but the imagination, mighty in each, is of quite different order. Wordsworth is of closer kin to Carlyle's great disciple, Ruskin. These two are of one spiritual family, and their conceptions of the social state agree down to minute detail. They are one in their emphasis on life in the country, intimate with a pure and lovely nature, and on the dignity of agricultural toil. There are whole chapters in "Fors Clavigera" which read like an elaboration into practical schemes of the underlying principles of Wordsworth's poems on the Westmoreland peasantry. To both, the dalesmen, ignorant in mind and wise in spirit, with their frugal integrity, industry, and peace, are ideal Englishmen. Both unite in longing that the sound of the spinning-wheel be once more heard in the land. Priests of beauty, both mourn the vandalism of the time, and the destruction of monuments of the past. Almost we can hear Ruskin's echo to Wordsworth's cry in his sonnet "Lowther:"—

> "Hourly the democratic torrent swells—
> For airy promises and hopes suborned
> The strength of backward-looking thoughts is scorned.
> Fall, if ye will, ye Towers and Pinnacles,
> With what ye symbolize: authentic story
> Will say ye disappeared with England's glory."

The two men quite agree in their estimate of the modern industrial world. To both, the "manufacture of Souls of a good quality" is of supreme importance, and the present system is scathingly denounced for ignoring this sacred principle.

Here the greater thinker is with them. But neither Ruskin nor Wordsworth shows the manly recognition of stern fact native to the son of the Scotch peasant. Neither is willing to confess, with Carlyle, the necessary permanence of certain factors in the present industrial order. Their cry, like his, is for simplification of life: unlike his, it is also for simplification of labor. Curiously enough, however, the old poet is more "canny" on this subject than the younger writer of prose. Wordsworth qualifies carefully his abuse of a modern manufactory, gives us a bright picture of the good of machinery before turning to its evil side, and never cries to an unhearing world to come forth and flee into the desert of solitude and hand-labor quite so insistently as does Ruskin.

The central thought of Wordsworth and Ruskin is one. The demand for joy — a demand foreign to the grim convictions of Carlyle, rough student of human history — is at the heart of their social gospel. For the poet in verse and the poet in prose knew a similar development. If nature and man were the early teachers of Wordsworth, nature and art were the guides of Ruskin; and peace was the childhood's heritage of both. Their first work was to reveal the beauty they had seen, and "Modern Painters," like the early poems of Wordsworth,

is one long chant of praise. But in middle life both men became aware that entrance into the freedom of the lovely world is denied to the vast majority. Both then turned grave and sad, lost in large measure their winged fire of utterance, and gave us "words, words, words," weighed down with "the heavy burden of mortality," "the burthen and the mystery of all this unintelligible world." Wordsworth and Ruskin share in general the same soul history; for, akin in spirit, they are swept onward by the same movement of the age.

If we proceed still further in the sequence of modern thought, we find another poet in the same line of spiritual descent. As Ruskin is the disciple of Carlyle, so William Morris is the disciple of Ruskin. He differs utterly from Carlyle, Ruskin, and Wordsworth in all those faculties which "look towards the Uncreated, with an eye of adoration, with a thought of love." The spiritual eyes are closed in the friend of Swinburne. But so far as his sight is turned towards earth, Morris is in the Wordsworth tradition. In the hatred of modern haste and ugliness, in the shrinking from the present industrial system, in the love of the country as man's true home, in the simplification of both inner and outward life and the emphasis on a receptive spirit as the end to which labor is a means, Morris and Wordsworth agree. But the name of William Morris launches us in the full tide of socialism.

Wordsworth, of course, is not a Socialist. He

would have repudiated the term with horror, confounding it with anarchy. The irreligious communism of Morris would have been terrible to him. Yet we have in his poetry from first to last, indications, unconscious to him but clear to us, of that modern movement which sets towards the social democracy. An alien almost from earliest years in his own generation, he groped in the darkness towards a better day. The man who wrote on the margin of an article ranking him as a democrat in the old individualistic sense, "I am a lover of liberty, but am aware that liberty cannot exist apart from order," was not far from the socialist kingdom of heaven. The practical propositions of his later years are at times blank socialism, as when, in the postscript to Poems of 1835, he claims in plain English "the right of the people to public support, when from any cause they may be unable to support themselves." But his fellowship with the socialist lies deeper than any specific propositions. It is in the whole trend of his thought, and the whole temper of his manhood.

Wordsworth and the Modern Socialists.

In our outer world, Wordsworth would find himself no more at home than when he looked out on life from his pure lake solitude, sixty years ago. The tendencies which were mewing their mighty youth around him then are mightier in maturity to-day. Individualism has gone on conquering and to conquer. In politics, industry, religion, it reigns supreme. Our vast development of material wealth and applied science makes

the most artificial society of his day assume in retrospect an almost Laconian simplicity. Around him Wordsworth would find the intensification of all that he deplored. But there is an inner world of thought, just beginning to struggle into action. Every century knows such a world; silent, dark, hidden from the ken of the children of the present; the world of the children of the future, to be born at the fitting time. And here the poet of "The Excursion" would feel himself strangely at home. Many of his political views he would indeed be forced to surrender, but the deep and vital convictions which were his inspiration through youth and age he would hear developed and repeated by voice of poet and essayist and priest. In that world of promise, he would find himself one of a great brotherhood. And this world, yet secret but destined one day to become apparent, is the world of socialism. In Wordsworth's conception of the state, in his emphasis on government, in his correlation of law and freedom, we trace socialism as philosophy and politics. In his interpretation of the soul of the poor, his honor for labor, and his demand for a voluntary return to the people, we have the germ of that higher ethical socialism which needs no machinery and is already anticipating in detail the work of the social revolution.

The Socialists are all claiming Shelley to-day as their own: it does not occur to them to claim the poet of "The Excursion." Nevertheless, Shelley's hatred of government and exaltation of impulse

bring him much nearer to the anarchical than to the socialistic ideal. His faith is that of the early Revolution: beautiful but childlike, with the note of the visionary and of the doctrinaire. The quieter voice of Wordsworth utters a deeper wisdom. His serene and unostentatious convictions are in essence unconventional and radical as the most startling opinions of Shelley; his insight into the modern problems of sorrow is as deep and sad; his hints at solution, if less dazzlingly absolute, are in the line of more actual and feasible development. Wordsworth inspires to less hopefulness for humanity, but perhaps to a greater reverence for man.

Yet one star differeth from another star in glory. In the social renaissance which our century is witnessing, Wordsworth and Shelley are both prophets and pioneers. It matters not a whit that Wordsworth sneered at Shelley and that Mary Shelley has in her journal a delightful entry: "S. and I read 'The Excursion.' Much disappointed. He is a slave." The two great spirits never apprehended each other, but we can apprehend them both. The poet of "The Excursion" and the poet of "Prometheus" bear the standard of the future side by side.

Phases of the Social Renaissance.

Two great forces, each seeking freedom, were held in the democratic ideal when it first appeared. One was individualism. It felt the sacredness of each separate life, and held for creed the right of every man to free

and full development. The other was socialism. It felt the sacredness of the collective life, and held for creed the common duty of moving towards the free harmony of the perfect social state.

In the wide-sweeping vision of the poets of the revolution, the two factors coexist: neither is fully developed. We have but to remember Wordsworth's reverent treatment of a Michael, a Leech-gatherer, a Lucy, to realize his imaginative worship for each separate human soul; yet we have but to compare these figures, serene types of universal humanity, with a Caponsacchi, or even an Enoch Arden, to realize how short a distance differentiation has gone. The great sonnets to Liberty and Order alone would show us, on the other hand, how keenly Wordsworth was touched with the passionate sense of the collective life. All his poetry pulsates with this sense. To Browning, family and state form a simple background for the intense personal drama; in Wordsworth they control experience, and suppress all alien passion. When conscience and family loyalty conflict, as in the "White Doe of Rylstone," there is naught left for a Francis or an Emily but miserable, high endurance. Yet in spite of this inexorable sense of duty to the whole, the conception of society in Wordsworth is primitive in the extreme, the distinct collective consciousness scarcely developed. Individualism and socialism are held together, but held in embryo, in the imagination and passion of Wordsworth.

But the cry of the individual life proved the

stronger. The development of a democratic individualism has absorbed our energies. In public and industrial life the results have been hideous; in poetry they have been great. If individualism has produced a competitive industry, it has also produced "The Ring and the Book."

Its process is complete and its last word has been said. Already, as a theory, it is becoming a thing of the past. Our Victorian poets were its singers and interpreters. Great was its glory; but it is a glory fled. Already socialism is emerging from the hidden world of thought to the world of act. We wait the poet of the New Era, who shall sing the cause of labor, the unity of the race, the high society to be. He must sing, not with the simple, unconscious faith of Wordsworth, not with the nebulous passion of Shelley, but with a grave and deeper knowledge born of later times. Shall he herald that fair society of the future? Shall he but hail it when it comes? We cannot tell, for he is not yet among us. So far, socialism has no poet but Morris, whose voice is too faint to carry far.

The era of Wordsworth and Shelley was the day of prophecy, serene, comprehensive, and high. The era of Browning was the day of competition and bitter struggle, each man battling alone for Truth, for Wealth, for Love.

A new world is upon us. In thought, in passion, in legislation, it is making its way. In the presence of this new world the imagination is silent still, listening to a yet distant harmony.

The time will be when the music will roll nearer, and those will not be wanting who shall have power to hear it and to repeat. Far and faint in the distance, we dream of yet another poet: the poet of the new synthesis, who shall chant at once men and the race. Of his unimagined music, the exquisite notes of Wordsworth may be the pure faint spirit echo, before the times are come.

# III

## IDEALS OF REDEMPTION, MEDIÆVAL AND MODERN

Dante, Spenser, and Shelley.

ONE great order of literature gives us life individualized; this is realistic art. Another gives us life essential: this is ideal art. For both orders we return thanks.

We are fortunate in possessing three great symbolic poems which express the attitude towards spiritual truth of three great periods.

The "Divine Comedy" of Dante, finished in 1320, holds as in a crystal sphere the light of the Middle Ages. Just after Dante, this light passed into the differing glory of the Renaissance. Indeed, the Italian critic Carducci claims that Dante was, even in his own time, a man of the past. Certainly, it is a civilization "matura ed intera" which in its completeness shapes and suffuses the sacred poem.

The "Faerie Queene" of Spenser, finished in 1596, is the perfect expression of that period from which Dante recoiled with prescient repugnance, — the Renaissance. But it is the Renaissance spiritualized which Spenser gives us, — the English Renaissance, offspring of two great movements, the Reformation and the New Learning. These two movements, religious and secular, united to

shape the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern world. Separated on the Continent, they are fused with strangely fascinating result in the work of the English poet — Protestant of the Protestants, steeped in classical lore, and controlled by a sensuous passion for beauty.

The "Prometheus Unbound" of Shelley, written in 1819, flashes on our eyes another vision, the vision of the Revolution, the sunrise of the modern world. Behind it lie the civilizations of Dante and Spenser, before it stretches the world of to-day. The drama faces East; yet all its promise is charged with memories, "low, sweet, faint sounds, like the farewell of ghosts," recalling the elder world.

The Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Revolution; here are three noble periods. Great is the gift which their three sons have left us. For in these poems we may study the distinctive life of all these periods, — its passion, its problem, its inspiration, and its aim.

Shelley is perhaps the least of the poets, and the Revolution is certainly the least of the periods. Dante is the greatest, not only among these three poets, but perhaps among all Christian writers. The revolutionary ideal expressed by Shelley lasted in its integrity for a comparatively brief span of time, while the majestic ideal of Dante was the unmoved shelter of centuries. Moreover, even during the short time, less than a hundred years, when revolutionary conceptions reigned supreme, they did not reign alone. In Dante's

day, there was one ideal. In Shelley's, the ideals were many. The modern complexity was upon us, and conflicting dreams of salvation were hurtling one another in the air. It was impossible for any one man to reflect such an age in its entirety; it was especially impossible for Shelley, the child of his age, its prophet, if you will, but not its guide.

The "Prometheus Unbound" is then a work of far less significance than the "Divine Comedy." It is the work of a smaller man, in a smaller period, and it does not even render that period completely. But this period is our own; at least, it leads directly into our own and its faith leaps in our veins to-day. Shelley, moreover, though a lesser genius than Dante, is a genius both exquisite and great, and the "Prometheus" is a great poem. Since then the drama is the best exponent we have of the revolutionary faith, let us put it by the side of its great forerunner. If from time to time we turn for illustration to the great poem of the transition period, the "Faerie Queene," we may gain fuller light on the movement of life through the centuries.

A simple phrase covers what we are to compare, the Ideal of Redemption. For by this ideal, the distinctive energies and character of an age are determined.

The poems are all allegorical, or, to use a better word, symbolic. The form of the story varies, of course, in the three.

Dante, wandering in the wood of life, beset with

perils, is met by Virgil, human knowledge, whom Beatrice, heavenly wisdom, has sent to be his guide. Virgil leads him through Hell and Purgatory, showing him the "perduta gente" and souls content in the purifying flame because of the Hope of Glory. On the summit of the Mount of Purgatory, Beatrice meets him, "dolce guida e cara." By the light in her eyes she lifts him upward, through the spheres of glorified spirits, till he is shown the mystic Rose of the Blessed, and attains at last unto the Beatific Vision of the Most High.

Spenser, less mystical and contemplative, breathing in an age of adventure and action, pictures the spiritual experience of man, not as a journey but as a warfare. It is the battle of noble knights against evil and distress. He planned twelve champions, representing the twelve moral virtues, but the protagonist of the poem is Arthur. The sum of excellence, he moves through the enchanted realm a vague, radiant, and wistful figure, in search of that Faerie Queene of spiritual glory beheld by him in dream alone. As he wanders, filled with yearning for the vision, he is the champion of all the knights, righting evil, succoring the oppressed, consoling the sorrowful. The poem is not finished; and Gloriana within the limits of the "Faerie Queene" is never found.

To Dante, the struggle of life is pilgrimage; to Spenser, it is warfare; to Shelley, it is endurance. Prometheus, representative and champion of mankind, himself pure, is yet the thrall of evil.

Tyranny, in requital for his benefits to man, has fastened him, helpless, upon the cliff of torture, where, patient and sinless, he hangs as the generations pass. Sister spirits, Faith and Hope, watch at his feet. He resists all temptations to flesh and spirit, and his forgiveness of his enemy is the signal of his redemption. Asia, his beloved, the Spirit of Love and Nature, is awakened from a remote dream, follows a mystic summons, and by contact with Demogorgon, the Spirit of Revolution, saves Prometheus. He is liberated from his chains; his dethroned foe melts into naught; and he reigns victorious, united to his love, over a peaceful earth.

Shelley's story, though his own, is of course modeled on the Æschylean myth, while the sources of Dante and Spenser are essentially Christian and mediæval. For, strong though the classical element be in both poets, it comes to them through Christian tradition, and blends with the Christian scheme of action. The Hellenism of Shelley is of a new order. He is the forerunner of that neo-paganism, which, all through our modern English poetry, since the religious revolution, has instinctively sought to escape Christian influence, and return to classic forms.

There are other broad initial distinctions to be drawn between our three poems. The "Divine Comedy" has a passionate personal interest lacking to Spenser and to Shelley. Its action is remote from earth and time; it takes place in a spiritual eternity; while on this earth, though in

the realm of Faerie, the knights of Spenser battle, and Prometheus hangs on an earthly cliff. In scene, then, in form, and source, the three poems differ widely. Yet deeper than their difference lies their likeness. Their central unity of theme gives us the right to compare them. Through varying symbols they tell the same story, the story of the human soul, as it moves from passion to peace.

Parallels in the Poems.

And indeed, the differences, as we look at them, seem in a measure to melt into thin air. The hero of the "Divine Comedy" is Dante, lover of Beatrice, hater of Florence; but with even more intense reality, he is the Soul itself in its strange wandering. The scene of the poem is literally the after world, but the adventures befall a man of flesh and blood, and in truth certain though hidden, the whole action takes place within that mind of man wherein are the abyss, the mountain, and the stars. Under the varying forms of story, the sequence of experience is the same. In the early portions, the poems present evil, under its various aspects; in the centre, the process of redemption; towards the end, the final triumph and the attained glory. These three phases are somewhat mingled in the "Faerie Queene," but in the "Prometheus" and the "Divine Comedy" they are clearly consecutive. The first act of the "Prometheus Unbound" is the "Inferno" of Shelley. It is the great act of the torture of Prometheus, and is overshadowed

by the murky wings of furies. Act II., Love's pilgrimage of redemption, is Shelley's version of the journey up the purifying Mount. In Acts III. and IV. we have the final triumph, and the vision of the end. The spiritual sequence in the two poems is the same, and the imagery of each suggests, though with wide differences, that of the other.

In all the poems there are three dominant interests, and these interests are identical.

First, the pure interest of the story. Utterly unlike as the legends are, they all hold and charm the reader by a spell that cannot be broken even if no occult meaning occurs to the mind.

The second interest may seem strange to us; yet it is not only strong, but at times controlling. It is political. The pure idealist is popularly supposed to care little for earthly affairs. Such thought is folly. The pure idealist is always a man with a throbbing consciousness of his own time. These three idealists quiver with political passion. The only wholesome influence left to the wicked souls steeped in the deathful life of Hell is a flickering interest in the affairs of their native town. This might be assigned to their bestial earthliness; but when Dante is uplifted into Paradise, lo! the celestial spirits too are talking of the sins of Florence. Politics is the one interest found in every sphere. Dante's bitter resentment of the evil of his city fills him with fever and introduces the note of tumult even in the midst of heavenly peace. In his supreme moment, the

moment when the whole Heavenly Society is shown to him, there flashes upon his soul the vision of his earthly city, and with the reticence of terrible and haughty irony he cries: —

> "Io, ched era al divino dell' umano,
> Ed all' eterno dal tempo venuto,
> E di Fiorenza in popol giusto e sano,
> Di che stupor doveva esser compiuto!" [1]

Spenser is akin to Dante, though his passion is less compact of flame. His political allegory is elaborate; the "Faerie Queene" is full of political characters and of ecclesiastical allusions. Shelley is, curiously enough, poorest of the three in direct, detailed, contemporary interest; yet he models his whole drama on the form of the French Revolution, and its spirit sounds in every line. The political outlook of Shelley is, however, as might be expected, the exact reverse of that of the older poets. They are aristocrats and conservative; the child of the revolution is anarchist. The supreme longing of both Dante and Spenser is for a pure Church in a well-ordered State. The supreme longing of Shelley is for the overthrow of Church and State alike. Dante's good is Shelley's bane, but political and social passion burn as strongly in the modern dreamer as in the mediæval seer.

But deeper than story, deeper than the political

[1] I who to the divine had from the human,
From time unto eternity had come,
From Florence to a people just and sane,
With what amazement must I have been filled!
*Paradiso*, xxxi. 37–40.

interest of the poems, lies that which makes them one. It is the spiritual interest. The conflict of the human soul, — this was the one fact of supreme importance to Dante, to Spenser, to Shelley. Their three great protagonists meet the agony of life and wring from the agony triumph.

Pain, expiation, glory, — under this threefold experience life is conceived in every century. But the centuries differ in their thought of the source of the pain, the nature of the expiation, the meaning of the glory. Let us compare our three poems, and, finding wherein the modern poem gains and wherein it loses, we shall possess a deeper insight into the value of that interpretation of human life by which we have been shaped.

The Problems.

The problem and the protagonists. What is to be achieved, and who are the heroes that achieve it? The problem first.

In the "Divine Comedy" it is clear: the purification of the soul. The action of the poem centres in Dante. Not as a mere spectator does the Florentine pass among these strangely living shades. Through the vision of horror, struggle, and peace, his great and sorrowful spirit is drawing near to God. We gain hints of the necessity of expiation at the very beginning, where Dante tells us that he has wandered from the "diritta via," and strives in vain to climb the Holy Hill. In the clear and tender light which at the base of the Mount of Purgatory gladdens the eyes of the poets escaped from the dead air of Hell, Virgil

bathes his cheeks, soiled with the hue of sin, in purifying dew and girds his thighs with a humble reed; and weighed down by guilt, but "seeking liberty," Dante climbs the severe height. Upon his forehead are inscribed the seven Peccavis, which only the scaling of the mountain can remove. On the summit of the mountain, in the Earthly Paradise, his Beatrice comes to him; she greets him with scathing words, marvelous in austere loveliness. He has been false to her: —

> "E volsi i passi suoi per via non vera
> Immagini di ben seguendo false,
> Che nulla promission rendono intevva.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "Tanto giu cadde, che tutti argomenti
> Alla salute sua eran già corti,
> Fuor che mostrargli le perdute genti."[1]

Deeply penitent, the lover of Beatrice is drawn through the rivers of Lethe. Free now from sin, his soul, gentle and adoring, is lifted into the celestial light; and mounting upward and upward, drawn by his Lady's smile, becomes at last worthy to receive the greatest of the Beatitudes, the blessing of the Pure in heart. The Purification of the Soul! This is the true theme of the sacred poem.

> [1] And into ways untrue he hurried his steps,
> Pursuing the false images of good,
> That never any promises fulfill;
>
> . . . . . .
>
> So low he fell, that all appliances
> For his salvation were already short,
> Save showing him the people of perdition.
>
> *Purgatorio*, xxx. 130–138.

Very different is the theme in Spenser. It is objective, militant, the routing of the powers of wrong. The knights conquer indeed the evil in their own hearts, and there is a subjective side to the allegory; but it is subordinate and occasional, and the chief emphasis falls on the battle of the Church with the Devil and the World. In every book, some great enemy is overcome. The Dragon, Satan, Acrasia, worldly pleasure, Busirane, the lord of evil love, the Blatant Beast of slander, the impersonations of injustice, all yield before the pure spears of the knights. Beside these, and hosts of minor foes, all through the poem the great Paynim forces of unbelief are gathering for final conflict against the spiritual knights of Faerie. The clash of this great conflict Spenser was never to give us; but the ideal in his mind is clear from the beginning: the overthrow of the foes of God by the consecrated might of the Church Militant.

Shelley, like Dante, lacks the militant element. It is through endurance and contemplation, not through action, that salvation is to be wrought. But the poem of the revolution differs at heart from that of the fourteenth century. In Dante, the purification of the soul is the one thing needful, its liberation is the supreme longing of Shelley. To the modern poet, man is innately good, and purity is not a result but an instinct. Evil is foreign to the very nature of Prometheus. Enslaved by social and religious convention, in the shape of Jupiter, the representative of humanity hangs impotent upon the cliff: —

"Monarch of Gods and dæmons, and all spirits
But One, who throng those bright and rolling worlds
Which thou and I alone of living things
Behold with sleepless eyes! regard this Earth
Made multitudinous with thy slaves, whom thou
Requitest for knee-worship, prayer and praise
And toil, and hecatombs of broken hearts
With fear, and self-contempt and barren hope —
Whilest me, who am thy foe, eyeless in hate
Hast thou made reign and triumph, to thy scorn
O'er mine own misery and thy vain revenge." [1]

By the force of Revolution, man is at last set free. Demogorgon, representing the reaction to which overweening tyranny always gives birth, casts the oppressor down: —

"Ai, Ai,
The elements obey me not — I sink
Dizzily down, ever, forever down,
And like a cloud mine enemy above
Darkens my fall with victory." [2]

Strength cuts the bonds of Prometheus, Love and Man are united, and the great drama of revolution ends. The overthrow of tyranny has been its all-commanding theme. The aim of Dante is holiness; but the aim of Shelley is freedom.

The difference in problem mirrors the difference in the age. Dante's was a time of religious contemplation; Spenser's a time of adventure; Shelley's a time of revolution. Of necessity, Dante's highest ideal was the attainment of the Beatific Vision, Shelley's the destruction of authority; while the superb objectivity of the Renaissance could not be more strikingly evident than in its

[1] *Prometheus Unbound*, Act I. [2] *Ibid.* Act III.

power to turn towards the world of outward activity the thought of a poet naturally contemplative as Dante, mystical as Shelley.

The Protagonists.

If we turn from problem to protagonist, a like difference strikes us. The hero of the "Divine Comedy" is Dante the Mystic; the hero of the "Faerie Queene" is Arthur the Knight; the hero of the "Prometheus Unbound" is Prometheus the Rebel.

It would be hard to exaggerate the significance of this new appearance of the Rebel as typical and honored hero. Æschylus and Milton may indeed feel for him an instinctive sympathy, but neither dares avow it, and the elder Titan and Satan are both conscientiously condemned. In Shelley, the rebel is not only recognized, but recognized with pride. "Prometheus is, as it were," writes the poet in his preface, "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends." Bound helpless to the rock, the Titan hurls defiance at the sun: —

> "I laugh your power and his who sent you here
> To lowest scorn: pour forth the cup of pain."

It is rebellion quintessential, at its highest and purest, which Shelley gives us.

Of these three heroes, regarded as characters, Dante is by far the most vivid. Beside the passionate virility of his haughty, humble soul, the knights of Spenser are mere painted shadows, and Shelley's Prometheus hangs upon his rock as much

a puppet as the great figure of wood which represented the Titan upon the Athenian stage. This difference is largely due to the deeper personal interest inherent in the "Divine Comedy;" we shall always care less for Humanity than for a man. But, though a collective conception must always be a little cold, it need not be empty. Shelley claims to have eliminated from his hero the taints which stain Milton's Satan and the Greek Prometheus, and he is right; his ideal is faultless. Into it he has poured all the qualities which he imagines as factors in the perfect life. They are not many; Prometheus is simple; a brief list of abstract qualities, and we are done with him. He is lofty of spirit, forgiving towards enemies, untouched by sin, nobly firm in the rejection of evil or compromise, patient through suffering, filled with compassion and with universal love. All these traits are shown to us in verse of sweetest harmonies. To what result? We place beside Shelley's faultless Titan the ashen Florentine, with tight-set lip and the sign of sin on his forehead, and straightway human life becomes a holier thing. For the greatness of the human soul is to be measured less by the qualities it possesses than by the resistance it has overcome. The majesty of Prometheus springs from his resistance of tyranny without; but, having no foes to fight within, he suggests vacuity. Dante has sinned, therefore he is lower than Prometheus; he feels penitence, and therefore he is higher. He knows experiences into which the elemental Titan of Shelley can-

not enter; the rapture of pardon, the blessing of humility, the might of worship.

Into the mediæval protagonist has passed the passion of generations; into the hero of the modern poet have passed the theories of his author. The scope of emotion is vastly greater in the older poem. Prometheus cannot hate; Dante is supreme as a hater. If the modern attitude seem the higher, we must remember that the charity of Prometheus finds its source in his fatalism. To Shelley, the sense of moral responsibility is a shadow; Dante passes with silent scorn souls that have chosen evil for their God.

Even in the qualities they share, in the power of a great love and an unbounded compassion that is in them, the citizen of Florence towers above the rival of the Gods. "L'amor, che muove il sol e l' altre stelle," illumines the soul of Shelley as of Dante. But the love of Prometheus is a benevolence monotonously diffused; it is perilously near that travesty of passion which men call philanthropy. Dante's love is organic, human, varied. His ideal discipleship to Virgil, his loyal honor towards that "true topaz," his crusader ancestor, his tender courtesy to sweet Piccarda and indeed towards all the souls of the Blessed, above all his kindling, childlike, heroic love for Beatrice, — all this we have and more, of delicate shading and wide variety, to set beside Prometheus' elemental and characterless emotion. The contrast is most marked when we turn to that subtlest form of love, compassion. A majestic and unfailing pity,

we are told, is the key note of the nature of Prometheus. But we never see it active, and it is brought home to us by no sense of reality. Hardly a word of compassion, on the other hand, passes the white lips of Dante; and there are readers who, misled by his silence, conceive his sternness as cold. But his pity speaks in other ways than words. Take an example. Nothing, probably, is harder for the modern reader of the "Divine Comedy" to tolerate, than the return of Virgil, "sweetest father," to the gray light "where without hope men live on in desire." Dante utters no word of remonstrance. Virgil vanishes at the approach of the celestial procession which he may not behold, and his disciple's sense of personal loss is instantly checked by Beatrice. As we wax indignant over this seeming heartlessness, suddenly music fills our ears, the songs of the holy guard of Beatrice. The music which has sounded up the Mount of Purification has been drawn exclusively from Scripture or the canticles of the Church. Here is a new note: "Manibus date lilia plenis," a secular strain among the sacred songs. O Virgil, winding thy sad way down the mountain, hearest thou? Thy tenderest song upon angelic lips! God is just. From the Paradise of light, thou must return to Limbo-shadows. But on the Holy Mount of God the angels sing thy songs. True poet, art thou content?

Prometheus is an abstraction, Dante is a summary. Prometheus is man as dreamed by a poet. Dante is man as created by God. And the thought of God proves the greater.

Having studied problem and protagonist, let us go further. What is the ethical scope of the poems? What our modern loss and gain?

Ethical scope.

The word by which we must name the central evil in the mediæval poem is not popular nor modern. Sin, to Dante, is a desperate fact. It is not arrested development. It is not imperfection. It is not an unfortunate accident of blood. Nor is it weakness. Many weak souls are in Paradise, and there is a hideous strength to some of the wicked in Hell. Sin is deliberate, horrible choice of self rather than God. We feel the force of it in the vicious malice of the lost, we feel it yet more strongly in the mighty impulse, equal to the past impulse towards wrong, which keeps the souls in Purgatory of their own free will within the blessed, torturing flames.

Sin presents itself to Dante under many aspects; but it can never be confused with virtue. At the outset of his experience, he is confronted by three foes; the panther of Lust, the lion of Pride, the wolf of Avarice. Descending into the Abyss, he beholds the sinners, all in apportioned places, classified and fixed. Downward he passes, through the evil herds, — the lazy, the unbaptized, those who sinned through love, the greedy, prodigals, misers, the sullen, heretics, the violent, the fraudulent, traitors. In Purgatory, as he climbs from terrace to terrace, he leaves behind on each terrace those who are expiating some one of the seven deadly sins. The cosmogony of Wrong is known to Dante as the chambers of a house might

be. Towards sin and pain his attitude is one of shuddering recognition, of occasional compassion; of utter passiveness. The decrees of God are fixed, and to itself each soul must live, or die. The experience of the hero in the "Divine Comedy" is direct, not sympathetic. Of the effort to redeem there is nothing, nay, of the impulse to redeem no trace. The sole exception is in the prayers offered for the souls in Purgatory. The justice of God, solemn, immutable, is a constraining law. We cannot doubt that Dante, in recording the vision vouchsafed him by the Spirit of Truth, was moved by more than the overmastering impulse to create; surely his desire was set to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. But so far as the action of the poem is concerned, it centres in the salvation of his own soul alone. He accepts, with deep, speechless sorrow, yet seemingly with no instinct to bring succor, the agony which he beholds. Doubtless profound reverence keeps him silent. Yet one can imagine no modern man passing through those piteous shades without at least one heart-wrung cry: "Would God I had died for thee!" The austere silence of Dante is for a reader of to-day the most awful thing in the Inferno.

To Spenser as to Dante, sin is the central terror of life; but the aspect of sin has changed. It is no longer definite, hideous, obvious. It comes —how to a poet of the renaissance could it come otherwise? — with a fair face, disguised in forms of sanctity and beauty. It is baneful chiefly because

deceitful, and the most terrible falls of the knights come from their inability to distinguish good from ill. The holy aspect of Archimago, the appealing loveliness of Duessa, the glorious calm of Lucifera, these are the temptations to be met by simple, sturdy honor. In the confusion of the conflict, spears and shields are exchanged, the champions take friends for foes. Falsehood glides into the place of Truth, and the clear light of God seems at times quite obscured.

Yet if we have less clearness, we have more freedom. The poet of the renaissance takes us into a world of adventure, where the knights fight evil and subdue it, relieving suffering and slaying sin. To escape into this free earth, where the forces of man join the forces of God in the movement towards redemption, brings intense relief after the air, still though pure, of the "Divine Comedy."

In part, these differences must be, since Dante presents the unchanging truth of the eternal spheres, while with Spenser we are in this lower world of glamour, strife, and hope. Yet the varying attitudes are significant also of the spirit of the times.

Sharp temptations men might meet in the age of Dante, but there was no confusion between good and ill. They might depart from the ideal, they could not deny it. On the one side a righteous life, loyalty to the Catholic faith, Paradise, on the other contumacy, self-indulgence, sin, the City of Dis, the flames and ice of Hell. Such

were the alternatives, unswervingly distinct, which the vision of the mediæval poet beheld.

Turning to Spenser, a strange consciousness comes over us. What is this haunting sense, this breath borne to us from afar? It is the modern world that draws near. We feel the approach of confusion and doubt; at the same time a prophecy seems cast backward of a new freedom and of a wider hope, which the distant future shall reveal.

In the "Faerie Queene" we feel an approach; in the "Prometheus Unbound" we hail a presence. The modern world is full upon us. It moulds our thought, shapes our struggle, and determines our victory.

Despite all differences, the ethical attitude of Spenser and Dante is essentially the same. Not so in the poem of the revolution. The very action-centre of life is changed, for sin is gone.

Disbelief in moral evil was part of the creed of Shelley's day. Not self-conquest, but rebellion against authority, is the achievement of Prometheus. The Titan, we know, is sinless. He is permitted indeed to feel evil impulses, the sad inheritance of the race, but not for one instant do these invade the calm citadel of his being. True exponent of its time, the poem knows no evil which is not accident, and the resistance of tyranny is the crowning virtue.

The estimate of the moral value of this attitude will depend on personal conviction. But concerning the æsthetic value, there can hardly be two opinions. Shelley loses in eliminating Sin from

his picture of human life all that a painter would lose in eliminating his deepest shadow, — relief and variety. In poignancy of pathos and searching horror the modern poem is weak beside the "Divine Comedy."

But there are two directions in which it gains both truth and force. It has first a widening consciousness of the nature of the human struggle Shelley recognizes what no older poet ever knew, the insidious and profound danger of doubt. Evil allures with its beauty the knights of the renaissance, but the central difference between true and false is never for an instant denied. Truth may array herself in alien garb, yet she is truth forever. Of the modern agnosticism which questions her very existence, Spenser knows nothing. Far less is it known to Dante. The foe whose unseen icy presence forces men to-day back from the doors of action and faith, never haunted the dreams of the Florentine. His panther of shining hide, his wolf and lion, are of another breed from this phantom-creature, born of chaos. The definiteness of mediæval vision is lost to us forever. To choose the Good was the struggle of Dante; to find the Good is our struggle to-day.

An adequate vision of this great modern sorrow Shelley does not give us. He wrote near the beginning of modern life, when the rapture of emancipation was still stronger than the pain of unlimited question, when doubt seemed privilege rather than punishment, and its depths were still unknown. Nevertheless, with prescient spirit, he

makes doubt the very source and centre of his Titan's pain. Not the physical agony of glacier and vulture, not the separation from his beloved, not the consciousness of injustice, are the climax of the torture of Prometheus. But when the Furies, daughters of darkness, overshadow him with shapeless wings, when they whisper to him that truth is not, that self-sacrifice curses where it would bless, that good is mockery, and high ideals are illusions deepening the central horror of existence, then it is that his pure spirit quails.

> "Dost thou boast the clear knowledge thou wakenedst for man?
> Then was kindled within him a thirst which outran
> These perishing waters: a thirst of fierce fever,
> Hope, love, doubt, desire, that consume him forever." [1]

So cry the Furies; and the victory of Prometheus is in resisting not sin, but doubt; in retaining his faith in truth, though history, reason, intuition seem to strengthen the great world-lie.

We shall find deeper recognition than Shelley's of this great problem and agony of Doubt. But the "Prometheus Unbound" is the drama of beginnings, and we hear through all its glorious melody that a new sorrow has entered the world.

A new sorrow, and a new passion. Through every line of the poem throbs a passion ignored by Dante, faintly adumbrated by Spenser, the dominant spiritual force of the modern world, the passion to redeem. Call it what you will, — altruism, socialism, or the plain sense of brotherhood, — this is the gift of democracy to poetry and to life.

[1] *Prometheus Unbound*, Act I.

Look back through the great world-poems, and see the changing attitude towards the wide human misery. It is hardly recognized in Homer, where, beyond the normal human pathos, wholesome and pure, life is too alive to stay for question. It is recognized in Dante, but with repudiation or silence, and a heightened sense of the need of individual purity. It is recognized fully by Shakespeare, but the impulse is to flee before it.

> "Tired with all these, for restful death I cry,"

is the Hamlet-temper. Even in Spenser, the impulse to save is as yet but semi-conscious. Evil is crushed, not converted, and the attitude is rather militant than redemptive.

But through the "Prometheus Unbound," as through all our modern poetry, rings a new cry.

> "I would fain
> Be what it is my destiny to be,
> The saviour and the strength of suffering man,
> Or sink into the original gulf of things,"[1]

murmurs the great Titan, exhausted with his pain. It is the woe of the world, the woe of the world, that presses upon his weary soul. Helpless he hangs,

> "While his beloved race is trampled down
> By Jove's thought-executing ministers."

Latent in Dante, semi-conscious in Spenser, the new passion has risen into consciousness at last. Dante saves himself. Prometheus seeks to save mankind. Whence comes the new impulse, if not from the new freedom? To the objective religious

[1] *Prometheus Unbound*, Act I.

fatalism of Dante we must ascribe the pure individualism of his attitude; to the quickened faith in collective human power, emphasized by the revolution, we owe the modern movement towards the uplifting of the race. Son of the revolution, true exponent of his time, Shelley denies the fact of sin, and therein he loses. But in his consciousness of altruism and of doubt he signals the era of to-day, and therefore we hail him prophet.

The Symbols of Salvation.

We have thought of the problem and the protagonists, we have compared the scope of the poems. Let us look now at the symbolism through which deliverance is wrought.

Looking, we discover the loveliest likeness between the three great poets. In all, salvation comes through women, and these women are at once the instruments of redemption and the ideal of the perfect life. Spenser's Gloriana never appears upon the scene, but we may truly estimate his thought and vision from the beautiful First Book which is as it were a microcosm of all the "Faerie Queene." Beatrice, "loda di Dio vera," Una, heavenly maid; Asia, the very Light of Life, they are the stars that guide the three protagonists, centres of their hearts and of the poems. They purify, and they reveal. They represent the highest that their poets know. To compare their nature, the parts they play, their relation to their lovers, will initiate us deep into the faith of the three ages.

In each case, dramatic action centres in the

separation between the woman and her beloved, and reunion leads to final triumph. In Dante and Spenser, the separation comes from the fault of the lovers. St. George, through an error of judgment, is deceived into thinking Una false to him, and puts Duessa in her place. Dante, through deeper sin of heart and will, is himself false to his Heavenly Lady, when in dying she has "changed her life," and grown perfected in beauty. Prometheus and Asia are separated, through no fault of theirs, by the cruel will of Jove. All three protagonists are weakened and helpless while their Lady is remote. St. George without Una — Holiness without Truth — is valorous but mistaken, plunges into ever graver error, and is finally taken captive by the pride of sense. The soul false to Divine Wisdom — Dante untrue to Beatrice — wanders lost in life's forest, and can escape its foes only by exploring in her name all depths of agony, all heights of struggle. The Mind of Man, alienated from the Spirit of Love and Nature, — Prometheus far from Asia, — must hang, pure but impotent, upon the barren cliff.

Through the devotion of these Ladies of Love, the salvation of the soul is wrought. Beatrice descends even into murky Hell that she may summon Virgil to the aid of her lost lover, and when Dante is at last purified to behold her, draws him upward into light supernal. Una wanders in trustful search for her untrue knight, till, calling to her aid the might of Arthur, she succeeds in setting him free from fleshly prison; then she saves him

from the more ghastly horror of Despair, and conducts him to his foe. In the "Prometheus Unbound," Love becomes for man a pilgrim, and after long journeyings descends to the dark abode of Revolutionary Wisdom, and rouses the mighty, hidden force to set Prometheus free. Comparing these stories, we may feel the deeper note brought by sin in the poems of Dante and Spenser; but there is a peculiar loveliness, a shining pathos touched with the glimmer of pure tears in Shelley's vision, the vision of the Psyche-soul, aroused by the songs of Nature, going forth, helpless yet mighty, to seek the secret of Life and Fate that thereby she may set free her beloved. Not Beatrice descending in gracious state to the shades of Hell, not Una exploring the dungeons of Orgoglio, touches us quite in the same way as this wistful figure of Asia.

Beatrice, Una, Asia, all three are to their poets the source whence radiance streams. But in all three the glory is at first darkened. Una wears a black stole over her heavenly whiteness, and seldom does she escape from its shadow until the final triumph. She never, as it were, appears in full light. When her stole is laid aside she is deep in the sombre green of the forest, where softened light falls sadly on her "angel's face." Asia's figure is dim and languid, faint as mists before sunrise, when first we find her waiting in her Indian vale. Only as she is roused to action does the light of life visibly begin to kindle through her delicate and dreamlike form. Bea-

trice, the Glory of God, must not be shown us with her beauty dimmed. Not in the Inferno do we first meet her, but on the highest peak of earth where she comes attended by choirs of angels, her brightness softened by a cloud of flowers that the mortal eyes of her lover may not fail. But somewhat the same effect of light subdued is gained by the very fact that, centre of the poem though she be, for a long time we see her not. When we first hear of her, she is weeping, and we seem, as it were, dimly to discern her radiant figure through the mists and tears of the Inferno. Dante would not let us see the tears of Beatrice; but we must learn from afar of her weeping that we may be able to endure her smile, we must long pine for her in the shadows, that we may be worthy to hail her in celestial light.

And, as they are shown to us first clouded and darkened by sorrow, so the movement towards victory is marked by their growth in radiance. With Una, the change is instantaneous. When the Great Foe lies dead with all his loathly length, when her own true knight is welcomed by her aged, happy parents, then she comes forth in her glory.

> "Then forth he callèd that his daughter faire,
> The fairest Un' his onely daughter deare,
> His onely daughter, and his onely heyre;
> Who forth proceeding with sad sober cheare
> As bright as doth the morning starre appeare
> Out of the east, with flaming lockes bedight,
> To tell that dawning day is drawing neare,
> And to the world does bring long-wishèd light:
> So faire and fresh that lady shewd her selfe in sight:

"So faire and fresh, as freshest flowre in May;
For she had layd her mournfull stole aside,
And widow-like sad wimple throwne away,
Wherewith her heavenly beautie she did hide,
Whiles on her wearie journey she did ride;
And on her now a garment she did weare
All lilly white, withoutten spot or pride,
That seemd like silke and silver woven weare,
But neither silke nor silver therein did appeare.

"The blazing brightnesse of her beauties' beame,
And glorious light of her sunshyny face,
To tell, were as to strive against the streame:
My ragged rimes are all too rude and bace,
Her heavenly lineaments for to enchace.
Ne wonder; for her own deare lovèd knight,
All were she dayly with himselfe in place,
Did wonder much at her celestiall sight:
Oft had he seene her faire, but never so faire dight."[1]

In Asia, we feel the gathering light from the moment when she sets forth upon her journey. Lovely before, her loveliness deepens till all creation blesses her path. But her full glory bursts forth only after her visit to the realm of Night and Demogorgon. In a rainbow-car, —

"An ivory shell, inlaid with crimson fire
Which comes and goes within its sculptured rim
Of delicate strange tracery," —

she is borne upward to a mystic height. There she is glorified in clear rose-flame.

"The sun will rise not until noon — Apollo
Is held in heaven by wonder, and the light
Which fills this vapor, as the aerial hue
Of fountain-gazing roses fills the water,
Flows from thy mighty sister."

[1] *The Faerie Queene*, I., 12, *st.* 21–23.

Panthea, her own "chosen one," cannot endure to behold her: —

> "How thou art changed! I dare not look on thee —
> I feel, but see thee not. I scarce endure
> The radiance of thy beauty."

The climax is reached when a Voice in the Air hails her in words of flame: —

> "Life of Life! Thy lips enkindle
> With their love the breath between them;
> And thy smiles before they dwindle
> Make the cold air fire; then screen them
> In those looks, where whoso gazes
> Faints, entangled in their mazes.
>
> "Child of Light! thy limbs are burning
> Through the veil that seems to hide them
> As the radiant lines of morning
> Through the clouds ere they divide them;
> And this atmosphere divinest
> Shrouds thee wheresoe'er thou shinest.
>
> "Fair are others; none beholds thee,
> But thy voice sounds low and tender
> Like the fairest, for it folds thee
> From the sight, that liquid splendor,
> And all feel, yet see thee never,
> As I feel now, lost forever.
>
> "Lamp of earth! where'er thou movest
> Its dim shapes are clad with brightness,
> And the souls of whom thou lovest
> Walk upon the winds with lightness.
> Till they fail, as I am failing,
> Dizzy, lost, yet unbewailing!" [1]

This is wonderful; yet the highest praise we can give it is to set it beside the vision of the

[1] *Prometheus Unbound*, Act II. sc. v.

Heavenly Beatrice, as she first deigns to turn her holy eyes upon her lover: —

"O isplendor di viva luce eterna,
Chi pallido si fece sotto l' ombra
Sì di Parnaso, o bevve in sua cisterna,
Che non paresse aver la mente ingombra
Tentando a render te, qual tu paresti,
Là dove armonizzando il ciel d' adombra,
Quando nell' aere aperto te solvesti?" [1]

From this point on, there is nothing in art or poetry to compare with the deepening glory of her eyes and smile. The light of them "transhumanizes" her lover and raises him from the human to the divine. His memory cannot follow her.

"Ma Beatrice sì bella e ridente
Mi si mostrò, che tra l' altre vedute
Si vuol lasciar, che non seguir la mente." [2]

The time comes when she dares not smile upon him, lest he be consumed by the rays.

"Già eran gli occhi miei rifissi al volto
Della mia Donna, e l' animo con essi;
E da ogni altro intento s' era tolto:
Ed ella non ridea; ma 'S' io ridessi,'

---

[1] O splendor of the living light eternal!
Who underneath the shadow of Parnassus
Has grown so pale, or drunk so at its cistern,
He would not seem to have his mind encumbered
Striving to paint thee as thou didst appear,
Where the harmonious heaven o'ershadowed thee,
When in the open air thou didst unveil?
*Purgatorio*, xxxi. 139.

[2] But Beatrice so beautiful and smiling
Appeared to me, that with the other sights
That followed not my memory I must leave her.
*Paradiso*, xiv. 79.

Mi cominciò, 'tu ti faresti quale
Tu Semelè, quando di cener fêssi.
Chè la bellezza mia, che per le scale
Dell' eterno palazzo più s' accende,
(Com' hai veduto) quanto più si sale
Se non si temperasse, tanto splende,
Che 'l tuo mortal potere al suo fulgore
Sarebbe fronda che tuono scoscende.' " [1]

In this necessity that the eyes of Beatrice be veiled, we see how close Shelley comes to the thought of Dante. The Love at the heart of the world eludes sight, and is consciousness rather than vision.

It is significant to note the relation of the protagonists to these ideal women. From the purely human point of view, that between St. George and Una is perhaps the sweetest. True woman rather than abstract virtue does Una upbraid her recreant knight.

" Ah, my long lackèd lord,
Where have ye been thus long out of my sight ?
Much feared I to have been quite abhorred,
Or ought have done, that ye displeasen might."

---

[1] Already on my Lady's face mine eyes
Again were fastened, and with these my mind,
And from all other purpose was withdrawn;
And she smiled not; but " If I were to smile,"
She unto me began, " thou wouldst become
Like Semele, when she was turned to ashes.
Because my beauty, that along the stairs
Of the eternal palace more enkindles,
As thou hast seen, the farther we ascend,
If it were tempered not, is so resplendent
That all thy mortal power in its effulgence
Would seem a leaflet that the thunder crushes."
*Paradiso*, xxi. 1.

She is helpless in his absence, but when the two are together she heartens him in conflict and consoles him in sorrow. "Add faith unto your force, and be not faint," she cries to him. It is her stinging words which enable him to face like a man the temptations of despair: —

> "Come, come away, frail, feeble, fleshly wight,
> Ne let vaine words bewitch thy manly heart,
> Ne divilish thoughts dismay thy constant spright —
> In heavenly mercies hast thou not a part?"

It is she who, after his bitter failure and sin, leads him to the House of Holiness, and listens, grieved yet content, to his cries under the lash of repentance. She leans on him, but she inspires him. The English poet of the renaissance has given us an exquisite picture of the Englishman and Englishwoman at their best, in perfect union.

At certain points, the conception of Spenser touches that of Dante, and Una is sister to Beatrice. At others, it differs. Through the enchanted forests of Spenser breathes a homely hedgerow sweetness, and Una with all her ethereal purity is an English maiden who could quietly grace a home. The modern woman, the domestic woman, is felt in her. But Beatrice is Lady of the Courts of Heaven. Dante's feeling for her brings us full upon that union of mysticism and chivalry which marked the Middle Age. Of his adoring love, what need to speak? The race-life knows no higher heritage. Her smile is "tal, che nel fuoco faria l' uom felice." But to Beatrice,

[1] *The Faerie Queene*, I., 9, *st.* 53.

Dante is child and disciple rather than lover. Bitter is the rebuke with which she first greets him. Her lofty sternness changes to lofty graciousness when repentance is fulfilled; yet to the last she is immeasurably above him, and the unspeakable remoteness whence, from her station in the Celestial Rose, she sends him the final ardor of her smile, is the perfect symbol of the relation between them.

Turning to Shelley, we find the same world-old and instinctive symbol, the love between man and woman, to express life's essential meaning. Yet as we speak we hesitate. The simple concrete terms ill suit Prometheus and Asia, those vast impersonations, real indeed, but real as shadows cast from earth upon the sunset sky. The love described by Shelley is fervid but characterless, absolute but remote from human comprehension. It baffles us as we seek to understand. Here is no suggestion, as in Spenser, of homely human bliss, no emphasis as in Dante on spiritual development through devout affection. The union is natural, not ethical; an impulse, not a consecration. Shelley's lovers are indeed interdependent. Prometheus without Asia pines in weakness: —

> "And thou art far
> Asia! who when my being overflowed
> Wert like a golden chalice to bright wine
> Which else had sunk into the thirsty earth."

Asia without Prometheus is dazed and languid; only by his image in the eyes of faith is she wakened from dream to deed. Yet necessary to

each other though these lovers be, in their love is nothing that sustains or guides. Through Asia, the salvation of the Titan is mystically and indirectly achieved; but she holds to him no direct relation, such as Una to St. George, Beatrice to Dante. Una and Beatrice express Womanhood; Asia is the simple expression of Sex.

The love between Asia and Prometheus is most strong in absence. No one has rendered as Shelley the passion of desire, the pure and tremulous yearning after an unattained ideal, a love felt only in dreams,—

> "The desire of the moth for the star,
> Of the night for the morrow,
> The longing for something afar
> From the sphere of our sorrow."

Here is the true home of his restless spirit. Dante cries out upon Beatrice, St. George, lacking Una, is lonely and distraught. But nowhere else have we as in this modern poem the quivering pain of Love unsatisfied, the beating of frail wings against the veiled Secret of the universe. A wistful longing for a glory lost is in the words of Prometheus, and through the wondrous melody of Asia's songs breathes a sense of incompleteness and desire. The Unfulfilled kindles all the imaginative fire of the drama. When the lovers meet, the poetry falls. The sense of reality is gone. Shelley himself touches lightly upon their union, as knowing that it held for him no meaning.

> "Asia, thou light of life," —

cries the freed Titan,—

"Shadow of beauty unbeheld . . .
Henceforth we will not part."

This is really all. No further personal note is struck. Nothing is here to compare with the grave and tender joy of the Red-Cross Knight and Una, when after long grief and pain they meet at last. Far less is there anything to put beside that greater scene where Beatrice, grave and glorious, comes at last to her contrite lover.

Shelley can give us love in absence, the love that is yearning; but the love that is possession he cannot give. He can give us the mystic rapture of union with an ideal; human tenderness lies without his scope; and love is sentiment to him, not discipline. Prometheus, with all his mystic thirst to absorb the very being of Asia, has no reverence for her personality. Asia with all her devotion knows nothing of the human need. The ideal is the absorption, almost the extinction, of each in each, not the perfection of each through each. The love depicted by Shelley can enrapture but it cannot uplift, it can liberate but it cannot save.

In his own way, Shelley is as religious as Dante. His love like Dante's is purified to worship. Asia is the Glory of the World. In the heat and radiance of her presence the soul faints with joy. Whence the world-wide difference between her and Beatrice?

World-wide indeed! For it is the difference between two religions, the religion of the middle ages and that of numbers in the modern world.

Shelley, like Dante, is a mystic. The Secret

hidden behind the veil is to both poets the supreme fact. Asia, as Beatrice, is type and symbol, "Shadow of beauty unbeheld;" but from a study of these two symbols, we may read all the difference between the mysticism of the middle ages and the revolution, of Christianity and modern thought.

For into Beatrice passes the thought of the Wisdom of God; into Asia, the thought of the Life of Nature.

Beatrice, we say, is Womanhood, while Asia is Sex, and this is true. The one is infused with a sacred and perfected Personality, the other is pure essence. But Beatrice is not personality alone, and she passes beyond womanhood. Her very being is sacramental. She is to Dante the symbol of divine glory and grace. The Asia-Symbol is no less full of meaning. Conceived at the dawn of modernism, it gathers into itself, not the supersensuous and the divine, but the elemental and the natural. Child of the foam, like Aphrodite, Asia marks the reversion to Paganism as clearly as the general theme of Shelley. It is the light of sky and water, the warmth of earth, the glory of blossom, which have passed into her form. She is the Spirit of Nature, to Shelley the only Spirit of Love. Beatrice breathes celestial air, and the unsubstantial light of the Primum Mobile is her abiding place. This world save in briefest visitation knows her not. Asia is gathered from the mists of earth. The vales of earth are her dwelling, its peaks and forests the scene of her pilgrim-

age, and the air she breathes touches our mortal cheeks. The "beauty unbeheld," whereof Asia is the shadow, is the Anima Mundi, the soul of the natural world; the vision whereon gaze the eyes of Beatrice is the Face of God.

Shelley was the poet of the revolution, and the revolution, on its intellectual side, was the signal of a new faith. Destroying ecclesiasticism, seeming to destroy Christianity, it threw men back on nature; and they found religion there. The holy mystery of the natural world was revealed to them; its glory, inspiring them all, finds supreme imaginative expression in the figure of Asia. The religion of the fourteenth century and of the nineteenth, of Christianity and of nature, are made clear to us in all their differing vitality if we place beside this lovely figure the sacred form of Beatrice.

The many differences in the handling of the two conceptions all spring from this great difference in their intent. Asia cannot be personal, since she stands for the impersonal force of nature. She cannot train her lover, for nature can inspire, but she cannot guide. The love between her and Prometheus is inevitably strongest in absence; forever inscrutable, forever apart, nature perpetually invites approach, but never yields her secret. It is not for man to pluck out the heart of her mystery. Asia is to Shelley the final, absolute good. Beyond her, there is nothing which man may ever know. Una and Beatrice, alike inspired by the divine love, come as messengers from somewhat above themselves. Therefore they have au-

thority over the soul of man; therefore, symbols though they be, they gain reality. Asia cannot worship; because Beatrice worships she can command. From the eyes of Beatrice, the Image of Christ is reflected; the comfort she brings to her lover in sorrow is the thought of her nearness to God.

> "Muta pensier; pensa ch' io sono
> Presso a Colui, ch' ogni torto disgrava."

When last he sees her, she flashes her glory full upon him; then turns to the Eternal Fountain; and we know that though Dante descend to earthly shadows, he and his Lady are forever one in adoration. The deep mazes of the eyes of Nature hold for Shelley no reflected image; she brings no message of the Divine.

In the dramatic entourage of the poems, we find difference of artistry and spirit akin to that in the conception of the women. The "Divine Comedy" is mediæval and Christian; the "Prometheus Unbound" is born of the revolution. Candidly agnostic, the modern poem seeks, though with imperfect success, to be atheistic. In its highest reach it attains to a faith which vivifies the nature inferior to man, but brings into the human sphere no powers from above.

The Ideals of Triumph.

In Dante and Spenser, help from above descends through countless ministries. Angelic visitations console and invigorate men in their wanderings, and visions of the Heavenly City inspire them on their way. Even in the Inferno, before the City

of Dis, where the Gorgon-head of denial of God is displayed on the evil walls, the august messenger of God sweeps downward with swift help. At the foot of the Mount of Purgatory, the white wings of the Bird of God waft over the summer sea the souls of those who fell asleep in Christ; and on the steep terraces gentle figures speed the suffering souls upon their way with singing, or come to succor them in time of need. It is impossible to express the tender and subtle ways in which, through unnumbered ministries of intercession, Divine Love falls upon the soul of Dante, as warm light from the heaven of heavens sinks through the atmosphere of earth.

In Shelley, all this is changed. Angels have given place to the personified forces of nature, or the instincts of the soul of man, varied only by a few classical figures. Jove, Panthea, Furies, Echoes, Spirits, Fauns, Hours, Elemental Genii, such are the chorus of the drama. Fair forms they are, whose melody is as the voice of winds and birds and waters, heard mingled from afar. Yet even as we gaze they elude us, and their ministry to man is wavering and sad. In his utmost need they desert him, and his strength is to be found in self-reliance alone. A kindled consciousness of the abounding but elusive life in nature has replaced the old faith in supernatural help.

As we approach the end, this change in attitude becomes most strikingly marked, and much that we have said finds summary.

Spenser shows us but a pause. The marriage of

St. George and Una is on earth and not in heaven. The Church is still militant and not triumphant, and the knight goes forth to renewed battle in the service of the Faerie Queene. What would have been Spenser's picture of the final triumph of Gloriana against the Paynim hosts, we can but surmise.

Shelley's poem also ends on earth. Yet the critics rightly place beside the Paradiso of Dante the third and fourth acts of "Prometheus Unbound." For Shelley knows no heaven but a regenerate earth; looking forward to no celestial future, he has given us here his purest vision of the life of man.

Externally and æsthetically, the elements of Shelley's vision and of Dante's vision are one. Both poets have overheard the singing spheres, and seen them whirl in mystic rapture. Flames of pure light that sing and dance, that flush and pale, that move in exquisite curves from glory to glory, such are the symbols in Dante which adumbrate the rapture of supreme bliss. In Shelley, they are the same. His imagination too is possessed by a whirling, circular motion; his ideal too is interwoven of color and motion and song, only the color is more broken into rainbow-tints, and the words of the singing are more clearly overheard. It is almost startling to find in these radically different conceptions so absolute an identity of symbol.

For radically different the conceptions are. Still abstractions and natural forces alone shine

through the symbols of Shelley. The Hours, the Spirits of the Human Mind, the Earth, the Moon, Demogorgon, the spirits of animal creation, the ghosts of the dead, are the speakers in the mystic chorus. To Dante, human souls alone, in all their spheres of bliss, are the exponents of redemption and of joy.

Very modern is this extension of conscious rapture beyond the soul of man, to all the visible world. We hail it as a grand and lovely gift to the imagination. Yet, taking all for all, the ideal of Shelley beside that of Dante is weak and thin. Even William Rossetti confesses of certain passages in the Paradiso: "They are doubtless quite as intense and quite as beautiful, and are even more moving, as being blended with a definite creed, and the heights and depths of emotion, personal and historical, that throb along with that. Shelley's theme has no such inner pulse of association; it becomes therefore all the more arduous and crucial an attempt." Nor can we feel the attempt successful. The life of Prometheus and Asia, absorbed in sentiment and the progress of the arts, the picture of a monotonously equal society, swayed by pure natural impulse, the vision of the progressive conquest of nature by man, all these pall on us. Not all the exquisite imagery of Act IV. can compensate for a hidden lack.

If Shelley fails, as fail he does, it is in company with all other inventors of Utopias. Imaginings of the perfect state, from Plato to Bellamy and Morris, bore us when they do not outrage. Their

monotony of bliss is empty, and they one and all ignore facts. Out of Holy Writ, no picture of ideal society can hold us. None, with one exception. Where Shelley fails, Dante has succeeded. The Paradiso is a glorious triumph. Our interest in the sacred poem grows deeper and deeper to the end; and the reader is obtuse who is free from the impulse to read the last three cantos on his knees. We rise from their perusal, not with a wistful sigh, "Is that all?" but with an act of praise. A future satisfying, nay transcending every desire, glorifying all experience, a future for which it was worth while to descend into Hell, this he has given us.

What is the secret of his success, where the poet of the revolution fails?

The first reason is æsthetic — his frank and exclusive use of symbol. Even Shelley fails by occasional intrusion of literal fact. Prometheus and Asia in their cave are too vague for personalities, yet they are also too human for symbols. The imagination, unsatisfied in either way, turns aside unfed. But from the moment when Dante is lifted to the first sphere by the eyes of Beatrice, the natural is utterly discarded, and figure melts into figure with swift and shining peace. The blessed souls, first discerned as reflections in shallow, sunlit water, become mere flame, light, and song. In mystic gyrations they circle round him, now shaping themselves into a Cross, Christ's soldiery, now into an Eagle, his dominion. Later, and lo! they are a river of light with flowery banks whence myriads of angelic sparks fly up-

ward. Still an instant, and once more they are changed; they form a rose of countless leaves, above whose divine fragrance the angelic hosts, like golden bees, are murmuring. All this marvel of imagery unfolds, silent and suave as the gathering dawn in a windless, cloudless night. So awe-struck with eternal peace is the soul that reveals it that his deep quiet becomes our own, and we pause, content with adoration.

But this perfect use of symbol was possible only to one who possessed Dante's peculiar faith, to whom Soul was the supreme reality. The true secret of his strange power to satisfy is not in his art but in his spirit. With an audacity impossible to the poet of the revolution, he promises us that wherein alone the soul can ever rest: the knowledge of the Absolute, the Beatific Vision of the Most High. This, this is the end of life; this, Dante tells us, shall be attained by penitent and purified souls. No Vision of the Absolute could Shelley offer; none has been offered ever by the natural religion of the revolution, or any of the vague religions of tendency which the century has since known. Man is pressed down forever into the relative. The woven veil of Death is never lifted, and the secret of existence evades humanity freed as it evaded humanity bound. Art, Philosophy, History, Love, all minister to Shelley's redeemed race. One thing he could not promise them: the Face of God.

So we return to our starting-point. The cen-

tral word of Dante is Obedience; the central word of Shelley is Freedom. The poet of the revolution longs for a state of absolute equality, unrestrained liberty, a state where, as we instinctively feel, growth cannot be. Dante, disciple of Virgil, servant of Beatrice, worshiper of God, mounts forever because his eyes are forever fixed on that which soars above. His peace, the peace of all the denizens of Heaven, is found in service and humility. The law of the Divine Society is exquisitely told to him by the least and feeblest of the souls of the blessed: —

Freedom Spiritual and Freedom Natural.

" Frate, la nostra volontà quieta
Virtù di carita, che fa volerne
Sol quel ch' avemo, e d' altro non ci asseta —
Se disiassimo esser più superne,
Fôran discordi gli nostri disiri
Dal voler di Colui che qui ne cerne;
Che vedrai non capere in questi giri,
S' essere in caritate è qui necesse,
E se la sua natura ben rimiri;
Anzi è formale ad esto beato esse
Tenersi dentro alla divina voglia,
Perch' una fansi nostre voglie stesse —
Sì che, come noi siam di soglia in soglia
Per questo regno, a tutto lo regno piace,
Com' allo Re, che in suo voler ne invoglia —
In la sua volontade è nostra pace;
Ella è quel mare, al qual tutto si muove,
Ciò ch' ella cria, o che natura face —
Chiaro mi fu allor com' ogni dove
In cielo è Paradiso, e sì la grazia
Del sommo ben d' un modo non vi piove."[1]

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[1] Brother, our will is quieted by virtue
Of charity, that makes us wish alone
For what we have, nor gives us thirst for more.

Beside this image of the Heavenly Society, place the revolutionary ideal: —

> . . . "Soon I looked,
> And behold, thrones were kingless, and men walked
> One with the other even as spirits do.
> . . . . . .
> None frowned, none trembled, none with eager fear
> Gazed on another's eye of cold command
> Until the subject of a tyrant's will
> Became, worse fate, the abject of his own,
> Which spurred him, like an outspent horse, to death.
> . . . . . .
> The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains, —
> Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man;
> Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
> Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
> Over himself; just, gentle, wise; but man
> Passionless? no: — yet free from guilt or pain,
> Which were, for his will made or suffered them —
> Nor yet exempt, though ruling them like slaves,
> From chance, and change, and mutability, —
> The clogs of that which else might oversoar

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> If to be more exalted we aspired,
> Discordant would our aspirations be
> Unto the will of Him who here secludes us;
> Which thou shalt see finds no place in these circles,
> If being in charity is needful here,
> And if thou lookest well into its nature;
> Nay, 't is essential to this blest existence
> To keep itself within the will divine,
> Whereby our very wishes are made one;
> So that, as we are station above station
> Throughout this realm, to all the realm 't is pleasing,
> As to the King, who makes his will our will.
> And his will is our peace; this is the sea
> To which is moving onward whatsoever
> It doth create, and all that nature makes.
>
> *Paradiso*, iii. 70.

The loftiest star of unascended heaven,
Pinnacled dim in the intense inane." [1]

Which is higher, — the differing bliss, the reverent obedience, of Dante, — or the ungoverned equality of the modern poet?

Dante's idea of Obedience is no blind allegiance to arbitrary rule. It holds within itself the promise and the principle of freedom. It is "cercando libertà" that he makes his pilgrimage. This liberty, indeed, is no innate right: it is a privilege acquired by hard labor. It comes late, not soon. Dante, subject to the commands of Virgil, has seen the doleful sights of the abyss; submissive to angelic hest he has climbed upward. At last the discipline is over; and on the top of the Mount of Purgatory, Virgil addresses him in wonderful words: —

"Il temporal fuoco e l' eterno
Veduto hai, figlio; e se' venuto in parte
Ov' io per me più oltre ne discerno.
Tralto t' ho qui con ingegno e con arte;
Lo tuo piacere omai prendi per ducett
Fuor se' dell' erte vie, fuor se' dell 'arte.
. . . . . .
Non aspettar mio dir più, nè mio cenno:
Libero, dritto, sano è lo tuo arbitrio,
E fallo fôra non fare a suo senno;
Per ch' io te sopra te corono e mitrio." [2]

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[1] *Prometheus Unbound*, Act III. 439.

[2] The temporal fire and the eternal,
Son, thou hast seen, and to a place art come
Where of myself no farther I discern.
By intellect and art I here have brought thee;
Take thine own pleasure for thy guide henceforth;
Beyond the steep ways and the narrow art thou.
. . . . . .

Dante has come forth into the glorious liberty of the Sons of God. Outward control he needs no longer. He is in Paradise; and

> "Ivi è perfetta, matura ed integra
> Ciascun disianza."

To him is said, as to the holy soul set free by death: —

> "You cannot now
> Cherish a wish that ought not to be wished."

He has attained

> "The ultimate angel's law,
> There, where love, light, joy, impulse, are one thing."...
>
> "Where love is an unerring light,
> And joy its own security."

His service henceforth is perfect freedom.

Freedom won through long discipline; freedom an innate right! Here again, as ever, the poems express the deepest thought of two great periods. Shall we not rather say, since historic periods are but symbols of perpetual fact, that these two poems express two attitudes of the spirit of man? Freedom through obedience! Here is the Christian conception. Freedom an innate right! Here is the revolutionary thought. Christ places Freedom at the end; the revolution places it at the beginning.

We have experienced much since Shelley wrote;

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> Expect no more or word or sign from me;
> Free and upright and sound is thy free-will,
> And error were it not to do its bidding;
> Thee o'er thyself I therefore crown and mitre!
>
> *Purgatorio*, xxvii. 127.

we have passed through a long century of struggle. To what does our experience impel us to give trust?

The revolution beheld Freedom from afar; not for individuals alone, but for the race. A shining summit with no clouds between, the men who first hailed it thought instantly to set their feet upon its holy snows. The morning faded and the cosmic day has swept on. But still we press forward, through doubt and pain, on, towards democracy, freedom, and the wide, pure love of brothers. We have not yet attained; but we thank the men who beheld; and because Shelley beheld, we hail him prophet. But the freedom we shall reach will be won by the discipline of years. We climb our Mount of Purgatory through darkened air and drifting cloud; and it may be that only this long struggle could prepare for the spiritual liberty which awaits us in that Paradise which, though on earth, is visited by angels, and blessed by the Divine Abiding.

In many ways, we enter a wider world and a more living air as we pass from the sphere of Dante to that of Shelley. There is exaltation in the new kinship felt with Nature and the stimulus to the religious passion found in the forms of the surrounding world. The love of humanity, and a joyous hopefulness for the future of the race, seem healthful complements if not high substitutes for the sad passion of religious individualism in the older poem. Gaining in breadth and freedom, the Prometheus gains also, at least in

truthfulness to modern life, by recognition of the sorrow and discipline of doubt.

Yet not with entire complacency can we lay our poems aside. If the elder poet has less sweep of vision, his spiritual insight is more keen. The problem of evil faces Dante and Shelley alike; and the Catholic answer of Dante, inadequate though it may be, meets fact and satisfies need better than the evasions of Shelley. If the modern thought of salvation is broader, to attain it we are left with less help. Shelley offers only the unlimited extension of limited conditions, and our souls weary of the thought; the poet of the Paradiso promises the Knowledge of the Most High.

# IV

## THE NEW RENAISSANCE

### 1. *Modern Reversions*

GREAT art is the reflection of its present, cry the critics on the one side. To great art there is no past, cry the critics on the other. Which is true? Must sincere art always follow with docility the realist dogma, and reproduce contemporary fact? Or does it dwell within that eternal present where forms of vanished antiquities and distant regions move ruddy with quick life beside their brethren of to-day? The Power of the Past.

A vexed question, to be solved less by talk or æsthetic theories than by the appeal to fact. And the answer is surely not ambiguous. Poets and artists have always, silently for the most part, shown themselves free by right divine of the wide kingdom of the ages. What matter to Shakespeare whether he pluck out the heart of the mystery of the Roman Brutus, the English King Hal, or the dream Prospero? The story of Cambustes bold runs as merrily through Chaucer's verse as the tale of the pilgrims. Long before the classic revival, Dante pauses in Hell by the flame that holds Ulysses, and a free wind from ancient, joyous Greece blows through the foul, infernal air, as

the hero, in words more buoyant than even Tennyson has placed upon his lips, recounts his last adventure. The imagination knows neither age nor country. Yet whether it treat the sorrows of a modern street-boy or of Titans dead, the art which results is realistic, since realism is simply the record of things seen, and the sight of the outer eye is dim and vague compared to the piercing vision of the eye within.

No literary period has ever sought inspiration from past ideals more eagerly than our own. There is something curious in these frequent reversions to dream and memory on the part of a generation which is perpetually clamoring for the actual modern Fact. The actual and the modern are given us in full measure, but our art with disdainful largess gives us more than we have asked. Modern poetry floods with unflinching illumination the tenement and the gutter; yet through the harsh light of to-day it conjures up now and again the moonbeams of the past, in whose radiance an Endymion or a Christabel may wander. From the mental vacillations of our spiritual aristocracy, it transports us in a twinkling to the calm passions and majestic pains of an elder world. The influence of the past! It is only less potent than the influence of science and of democracy over our modern English poetry.

Like all our literary movements, this poetic revival of the past is first evident in the poets of the revolution. Their poetry tingles with contemporary passion; English thought and English

scenery are its true kingdom. At the same time it strays with open-eyed and sweet audacity into any region and any time. Even Wordsworth, severely modern though he be, gives us two grave classical studies, and a romance, "The White Doe," where spiritual interest finds its true home in a mediæval setting. But for the most part the Georgian poets turn rather to the world of dream than of history. The seas over which sails the Ancient Mariner of Coleridge are swayed by no earthly tides, while Shelley's greatest drama takes place, if not in the cloudland of dawn, then among the mere shades of an imaginary Hellas. "Lamia," "Hyperion," the "Eve of St. Agnes," are no poems of remembered fleshly fact. They waft to us the breath of faery-lands forlorn, though of faery-lands where lives forever the ideal truth of distant climes and ages. We must turn to the Victorians if we would find a poetry of definite historic inspiration and a conscious, scholarly effort to reproduce by the imagination an actual past. And here we find almost an entire literature, complete in itself, formed by foreign influences.

Clough is the only Victorian consistently modern. The longest and most ambitious poems of Tennyson and Matthew Arnold find their themes in strange countries or bygone times. True, these poems are not the most vital, and "In Memoriam" and "The Grande Chartreuse" will be remembered when the "Idylls of the King" and "Balder Dead" are forgotten. But in the pre-

Raphaelites, Rossetti, Morris, and Swinburne, we have a group of poets to whom escape from the present is almost a battle-cry, and the entire body of whose work is infused with the blood of ages past though not dead. It is a positive shock when, as in Rossetti's "Jenny," a terrible modern fact invades their region of memories. Yet our most modern and realistic poet has perhaps excelled, in his interpretation of the past, even the acknowledged votaries of days that are no more. The vigorous spirit of Browning roams over all the world, scanning the island off the coasts of Lebanon as the wolf-haunted forests of Russia. From "Paracelsus," more full of the spirit of Luther's Germany than the casual reader dreams, and "Sordello," more full of the spirit and facts of pre-Dantean Italy than the casual reader likes, on through dramas and monologues and epics to the mobile and vivid Hellenic studies of his later years, Browning shows a more frankly human and unæsthetic interest in the past and a wider sympathy than any other poet.

Taking our modern English poetry in its entire sweep, we find hardly a country and hardly a century to which it has not turned. Even the eighteenth century finds slight but daintily wrought revival in the verse of Dobson and Lang. The imagination has strayed from Scandinavia to the Orient, from the dawn of history to the present day.

This vigorous modern movement towards the

past finds close parallel in the literary renaissance of Elizabethan England. Then Shakespeare, with superb indifference, drew Macbeth from his Scottish moor, Lear from the wild wastes of Britain, Coriolanus from the streets of Rome, Theseus from Athens, and Ariel from faery-land, to the English stage. Then his contemporaries, only less greatly inclusive, reached to Italy for a White Devil, to Sparta for a Calantha, to Rome for an Æcius and a Virginius, while Spenser in the "Faerie Queene" gave us an enchanted medley of classical learning and chivalrous tale. In the passionate impulse to break all bounds of contemporary fact, to explore the learning and reproduce the images of the past, our own age and the renaissance are one. As we place them side by side we see that we to-day have lived unconsciously through a second renaissance, mighty as the first. Ours, too, has been a time when not only the imagination but the spirit of man has sprung eagerly to hail the ideals of the past, to absorb their very life, and to repeat them in a world that had forgotten their message. The New Renaissance! Surely the future will note it, and will signal the influence of the past in the poetry of the nineteenth century as correlative with the influence of science, or of democracy itself.

The Renaissance, old and new.

But between the method of the first renaissance and of our own there is wide difference. The Elizabethans invaded the classical world with the daring and rapture of youth, swept its ideals bod-

ily into their own England, arrayed them in the dress of the period, and forced them to do homage to their Queen. The moderns, graver and more reverent, perhaps more languid as well, reverse the process. They take us by the hand and lead us gently backward, quite out of our own world of forms and thought, into past regions where men and women "in their habit as they lived" move inviolate and serene. The Elizabethans translated the past into terms of their own present; we of the later days seek at least to translate our present into terms of the unvarying past. The traditions of the elder world have always been a storehouse of delight for the poets; but from the ancient heroes metamorphosed into Christian knights of the mediæval epic to the Cato of the eighteenth century in wig and buckles, every age has shaped old forms to its own image. Even in the days of Shakespeare, the material was largely subdued to what it works in, and the assimilation of past to present is frankly naïve. Broad traditional distinctions are of course observed. Something of the true Roman flows from the pages of Plutarch into the veins of Brutus. Cleopatra breathes full East upon us, and the still swift passion of Sparta tingles through the Calantha of Ford, as she dances, smiles, and dies. Yet after all the heroes of Shakespeare are English at heart, though the Roman side of the Englishman be recognized in Coriolanus, the Northern trend towards speculation in Hamlet the Dane. What insight into alien ideals is found, is purely instinctive; for

historic truthfulness, take it for all in all, the Elizabethans cared not one whit.

But the nineteenth century demands, in its reproductions of the past, historic accuracy both of form and spirit. Our characters are of their own age, not only in name but in costume, not only in costume but in character. Swinburne's Althæa is, so far as we can judge, a real Greek matron, in severe beauty, brief speech, and bitter passion. The true Middle Age of missal and cathedral speaks through Tennyson's St. Simeon upon his pillar. Browning condenses the first renaissance into a monologue.

We have to-day for the first time in poetry a genuine, impassioned, imaginative impulse to reproduce the actual truth of the past. A new diversity of accent takes the place of the old sameness, and our poetry becomes a criticism of life in a more extensive sense than Arnold meant. That our work is really true to the past is of course impossible for us to say. We can hardly doubt, indeed, that through it all there breathes a subtle aroma of the nineteenth century, an air which had it touched the temples of a man of older days would have startled and alarmed him with the sense of something new blown from the fields of sleep of the future. Yet that our revivals of the ideals long since fled are beautiful, no one can deny; and, better than all archæology, they bring the past near to us and touch its marble to the semblance of life.

It is not hard to see in a measure why our age should have been first to attempt a genuine revival of the past. Such revival is, at least in part, the gift to art of the modern critical spirit. For the spirit of criticism and the spirit of creation, however they may square and spar, must wed at last. Our passion for historical knowledge, our studious energies, may indeed become ends in themselves, and for a while seem to stifle the creative imagination, confirming the doleful plaint of that literary pessimist who is always with us. But in process of time, new worlds open to our intellectual vision must always afford the stimulus of a wider range to the imaginative powers. Already the new heritage is to a great degree realized, and the poets are vivifying the results of historical research.

Yet the critical spirit by itself could never be the source of poetry. Increased knowledge may mean in verse mere weight without fire. The mass of fact must be "bedded in a quickening soul," to use Wordsworth's fine phrase. It must be by a spiritual impulse that our poetry of the new renaissance is redeemed from a display of dry erudition, or a cold imitation of dead forms. A true kinship of soul must draw the imagination of men to the past. Such kinship lends to our poetry of reproduction spontaneity, vitality, the actual note of experience. As Keats pores over the "Dictionary of Mythology," a flash of recognition reveals to him his own country, and Endymion appears. If Swinburne exults in paganism,

Browning in the renaissance, it is because these periods are their true abiding-place.

It is the spiritual restlessness of the age which is the secret of our singular power to penetrate and reveal the inner life of the past. Our times are an epitome of history: and they are ill at ease. Ghosts of the past blend with shadows of the future, and the life that is to be is not yet manifest. Bewildered, the sons of time wander through this dim land of cross-lights and confused darkness, seeking among conflicting ideals for the simplicity of truth. Small wonder that no one man, however many-sided, can feel fully at home in the modern world; small wonder that the poets, whose instinct ever seeks for peace, should escape by varying roads from a region where all ideals are found and no one ideal is untroubled, to that past where their spirits may find their own true country uninvaded by hostile hosts, and breathe their native air untainted by strange aromas. The Modern Renaissance! It springs, not alone from the scholarly passion for research nor from the kindling of the imagination, but from the fellowship of the spirit with the ages that are fled.

Thus the poetry of our new renaissance is modern after all. Our poets seek their own true and eternal present in those ages which have died but to rise again, in spiritual form. Our poetry of reversion has a freshness of passion that sets at naught all charge of insincerity. It is genuine, vital, personal. The spirit

The Periods Chosen.

of to-day speaks through it, or rather many spirits, such as govern these latter times.

Almost every age and country has given material to the eager search of our poets; but much of this material is touched slightly or used for literary experience. Our Russian, Oriental, Japanese studies, for instance, are the mere pastimes of an hour. The literary and critical instinct are present, but the spiritual affinity is not there. Again, there is special significance in the failure of one whole order of life to touch our modern poetry. With the savage and the primeval, our poets have nothing in common. The revolution had witnessed a strong reversion of sympathy towards this life. Such reversion is the inspiration of Chateaubriand and Rousseau, who imagine virgin forests in which they would have been supremely wretched, and picture the career of Red Indians as an ideal of purity and peace. The return to nature was the great watchword of the times; and if this return as imaged by French genius was a little operatic, it was heartfelt as well. We get the echo of this enthusiasm in Byron. The chosen life of his Corsairs is such as to make the Red Indian seem mild. But after Byron's day the passion for the savage swiftly died. Our Victorians are drawn to imaginative sympathy with ages widely different from their own, but these ages are all highly civilized. It is in peaks "citied to the top, crowded with culture," that the modern man finds himself at home.

Three ages have held supremely the imagination of our poets.

The first is the period of Hellenism, and it is interesting to see that our classical revival finds its inspiration in Greece. The classical revival of the sixteenth century turned mainly to Rome. The practical power of Rome, its noble patriotism, its spirit of conquest, were congenial to the compeers of Raleigh. The Roman plays of Shakespeare are firm flesh and bone: his "Pericles" is a dream. Webster's "Appius and Virginia," Beaumont and Fletcher's "Valentinian," are noble instances of the Roman impulse. But our own neo-paganism, from Keats to Arnold and Swinburne, is almost wholly Greek: and it is mighty.

Only less strong than the hold of Greece has been the hold of the Middle Ages on the imagination of the poets.

But it is the reproduction of the first renaissance which is the most curious, startling, and novel feature of our new movement towards the past. For here is the reflection of a reflection, the shadow of a shade. Yet in robust vitality as in faithfulness of reproduction, our poems inspired by the renaissance are unsurpassed.

In the modern world, old Greece lives again; the Middle Ages become once more vocal, the renaissance yet glimmers with bewildering brilliancy. Let us enter these little worlds that lie like inclosed gardens within the great and free nature of our modern English poets.

## 2. *Neo-Paganism*

Neo-Paganism! Not one modern poet of repute has been untouched by it, and in some poets it is a dominant power. The great name of Landor must be either dwelt on at length or passed over in silence, and the second alternative must be ours. Our regret is the less because in spite of "Pericles and Aspasia," Landor's paganism is rather Roman than Greek in type, and its superb robustness finds small fellowship in the modern world. But among the sons of the present age, what range, variety, and freshness in classical reproductions!

> "Surely I dreamed to-day, or did I see
> The wingèd Psyche with awakened eyes?"

queried Keats. Youngest born of the company of heaven, this Psyche-wanderer has floated through the inner world of the poets, leading a train that seems to catch from her the gleam of grave spiritual loveliness. The visions of Keats are first, assuredly, Endymion, Hyperion, and Lamia, with their attendant Titans, nymphs, and men. Wordsworth's Laodamia and Dion follow; then the Prometheus of Shelley, with Panthea, Ione, and Asia, those spirits whose form is of Hellas though their soul be of eternal nature. In the Victorian age, we have first the classical studies of Tennyson, Ænone, Ulysses, Tithonus, the Lotus-Eaters, where instinctive romanticism of treatment is subtly held in check by a certain pure Greek temperance. Arnold's whole work breathes of Hellas,

and his most considerable poem, "Empedocles on Ætna," is Greek in theme. Swinburne, in his "Hymn to Proserpine," vaunts himself, at the beginning of his career, the champion of the pagan revival, and in two noble tragedies, "Atalanta in Calydon" and "Erechtheus," reproduces, as was never done before or since, the perfect form of the Greek drama. Half the stories in Morris's "Earthly Paradise" are Greek. Finally, even Browning, in his old age, turns aside from the heavy air of the renaissance, freighted with memories and passions, to the cooler atmosphere of Greek thought. His translations from the drama are cleverly interwoven with subtle studies of Greek life. "Aristophanes' Apology" is marvelous in its concise and realistic rendering of Greek society; and Balaustion, one of Browning's sweetest creations, is radiant with pure Hellenic maidenhood.

This lovely neo-pagan poetry, standing as it does quite apart in the great body of modern literature, has a distinct and interesting development of its own. It passes from an unconscious and spontaneous passion for Greek ideals of beauty, through grave sympathy with Greek ideals of ethics, to a defiant and conscious adoption of Greek ideals of religion. Each neo-pagan poet expresses indeed in a measure all these three instincts; yet it is hardly fantastic to say that Keats is the best exponent of the first phase, Arnold of the second, and Swinburne of the third. Browning stands somewhat aside from the others; for his

classic work, with all its brilliancy, has a purely intellectual inspiration, and springs from no deep emotional sympathy.

The Æsthetic Attraction.

Our neo-paganism to-day is emphatically the product of a reaction. It springs from a profound discontent with the modern world. Such conscious discontent is new. What son of Elizabeth would have chosen to be a son of Pericles? What compeer of Pope would have abjured knee breeches in favor of the chiton? Spenser might with superb freedom clothe his classic figures in the iridescent garb of the renaissance, Addison in the correct and courtly costume of his day. But the moderns have not been content with borrowing from the past fair names and noble tales. It is very Greece that lives for us in their pages: for the former times seem to them better than their own. Complacency is no note of our poetry, and only the cheapest and the loftiest thought can to-day be content with its age.

This strong reaction against modern life shows itself first and chief in the instinctive joy in Greek ideals of beauty. It is hard for a lover of beauty to be at home in the nineteenth century, unless, like Wordsworth or Thoreau, he escape to the free communion of nature. Too comfortable to be lovely, sensitive imaginations roam restless and exiled through a luxurious world: escaping to the past of Hellas, they find the home of their desires, a sphere where dignity is the garment of beauty, and serenity the secret of charm.

"Not here, O Apollo,
Are haunts meet for thee,
But where Helicon breaks down
In cliff to the sea."

Early in the century, this impulse asserted itself with joyous, large impetuosity.

"The naiad mid her reeds
Pressed her cold finger closer to her lips,"

yet Keats read her secrets and led her lovingly into the light of modern day. The classicism of Keats results from no close scholarship and aims at no technical accuracy, like that of the later poets; yet into his marvelous, lavish, careless poems has passed the very spirit of old pagan joy, the creative impulse of the maker of myths. The light of suns and moons long set for us plays serene over these exquisite creations, that people the natural world with tender forms of life. Forever must we love and they be fair. As the century advances, the passion for Greek beauty becomes less simple, more involved with other elements than in the spontaneous verse of Keats; yet it is never absent. The cool freshness of a Grecian dawn breathes through Arnold's "Strayed Reveller;" the hushed sense of the present God rests on Browning's "Pheidippides;" and youths and maidens from a temple-frieze move in marble beauty though the tragedies of Swinburne.

The very style of our poets feels strongly the classic influence. Let them fall under the spell of Greece, and their instinctive romanticism of manner gives place to an accent precise and pure.

Even those most ornate by nature can reach at times a reticent perfectness, free from all sense of effort that outruns attainment, of mystery unuttered below the spoken word. It is in echoes which if faint are yet Homeric that the young Tennyson, forgetting his fretwork phrases, writes: —

> "On one side lay the ocean, and on one
> Lay a great water, and the moon was full."

The large utterance of the early gods sounds through "Hyperion." Swinburne of exuberant melody describes for us, with something of the wide simplicity and tempered truth of an older artistic method, his Arcadian Atalanta: —

> "Holier than all holy days or things,
> Than sprinkled water or fume of perfect fire,
> Chaste, dedicated to pure prayers, and filled
> With higher thoughts than heaven; a maiden clean,
> Pure iron, fashioned for a sword."

Another aspect of Greek style — its amazing conciseness, its abrupt, almost rough, realism, charged with subdued fervor — has naturally attracted Browning. From such poems as "Echetlos" or "Pheidippides," the superfluous has been banished as cleanly as from the limbs of a Greek athlete or from the choruses of Æschylus.

The genuine Greek spirit works, needless to say, imperfectly in our neo-pagan poetry. Neither Greek manner nor Greek conception is long sustained, untouched by the modern note. Yet a distinct modification in the classical direction surely affects theme as well as form. Chthonia, Callicles, Balaustion, are of the race of Antigone.

[1] *Morte D'Arthur.*

Tranquil in every controlled curve, in every reverent thought, these figures allure and charm. Theirs is no northern mystery of shadow, relieved by dim reluctant light; it is the mystery of entire light, relieved by pale, pure shadow. The unstained harmony of the Greek ideals draws our poets of an alien age to itself. Tumultuous and feverish, we would return to an untroubled calm — the calm of the young Apollo, as he gazes from the Vatican across seething Christian Rome: —

"Radiance Invincible! Is that the brow
Which gleamed on Python while thy arrow sped?
Are those the lips for Hyacinthus dead
That grieved? Wherefore a God indeed art thou:
For all we toil with ill, and the hours bow
And break us, and at best when we have bled,
And are much marred, perchance propitiated
A little doubtful victory they allow:
We sorrow, and henceforth the lip retains
A shade, and the eyes shine and wonder less.
O joyous Slayer of evil things! O great
And splendid Victor! God, whom no soil stains
Of passion or doubt, of grief or languidness,
Even to worship thee I come too late." [1]

Is it too late? Or may we hope to realize the vision of Shelley?

"Another Athens shall arise,
And to remoter time
Bequeath, like sunset to the skies,
The splendor of its prime;
And leave, if nought so bright may live,
All earth can take or heaven can give." [2]

Already, in thinking of the passion for Hellenic beauty, we have been led to the modern fellowship

[1] Edward Dowden. [2] Chorus to *Hellas*.

with Hellenic ethics. For to the Greek, beauty and life were one. Moral as physical loveliness springs from discarding the superfluous, and the principle of control in art becomes the principle of self-restraint in morals. It is sympathy with this grave "ascêsis" that in an age of passion often unchecked, always confused, has led our poets to Hellenism; it is the absence of such sympathy which makes the classic revivals of the first renaissance alien to the true Greek spirit. Early in the century, Wordsworth's calm nature felt and rendered the high ideal. His "Laodamia," with its severe tenderness and its stern lesson, stands among his other poems as a small, pure Doric temple might stand among the clouds and forests of Delphi. The whole classic doctrine of self-restraint is in the words of Protesilaus: —

The Ethical Attraction.

> "Be taught, O faithful consort, to control
> Rebellious passion: for the gods approve
> The depth and not the tumult of the soul,
> A fervent, not ungovernable love."

Poise and symmetry! How wistfully they are sought, in a time when the enlarged scope and increased haste of life seem to render self-knowledge impossible and tranquillity a dream. Even Tennyson, whose few classic studies are on the whole far more romantic in manner than those of any other poet, has felt the sway of this Greek ideal. The danger of aspiration! The duty of sobriety! In legend, as of Phaeton, of Actæon, the Greek loved to point it out. Tennyson has

seized on one of these legends, and with delicate modern insight has revealed its mystical meaning. His Tithonus, human and finite, suffers eternally from a granted immortality which he cannot now escape. "The gods themselves cannot recall their gifts." Better not reach beyond the common lot. Better the regulation of desire than the grasp at a star that may burn.

But if Keats reflects most spontaneously and completely the marvelous beauty of Greece, Matthew Arnold is the most perfect exponent of Hellenic ethics, as conceived by the modern mind. In Arnold, neo-paganism becomes self-conscious. The reticence and distinctness of the Greek spirit mould both his form and his thought. To him, as to the Greek, outreach into the Infinite is Ὕβρις, — arrogance, madness, death. He seeks to enforce the gospel of sobriety in his longest and most important poem, "Empedocles on Ætna." The hero chosen is the most romantic and mysteriously passionate figure among the Greek philosophers; the artistic method selected by Arnold is rigidly plain, chiseled and severe. Weary and worn, Empedocles, with a wondering, ignorant friend, leaves the hot city and climbs the cool slopes of Ætna. The songs of Callicles, the young harp-player, chaste, sad, tempered to perfect beauty, follow them as they climb. The philosopher with benignant majesty opens to his friend his best wisdom, tells him the strength wherewith life may be met, the end for which he may strive. It is the message of contentment

with common joy and quiet duties. It excludes sorrowfully but decidedly all illusion of a possible knowledge of the Divine, all striving after an infinite good. In stately lines, Empedocles preaches the moderation of desire, the cheerful courage of renunciation: —

> "Fools! that in man's brief term
> He cannot all things view,
> Affords no ground to affirm
> That there are gods who do;
> Nor does being weary prove that he has where to rest.
>
> "Once read thy own breast right,
> And thou hast done with fears;
> Man gets no other light
> Search he a thousand years.
> Sink in thyself! There ask what ails thee, at that shrine."

Self-dependence man's only strength — such is the grave summary of Empedocles. The English poet, putting it into his mouth, gives us his own conception of the central thought of ancient Greece. From this conviction, so Arnold would tell us, sprang the perfectness of the Hellenic ideal. Pressed down within the positive and human, satisfied, or if not satisfied, silent, the Greek was able, because of his very acceptance of limitation, to realize, as has never elsewhere been realized in East or West, the beauty, intellectual and physical, of the purely natural life.

The Spiritual Attraction.

The kinship between our neo-pagans and the Hellenic world is at heart spiritual. No mere æsthetic instinct, though in unbeautiful days this is vivid, no mere desire for Greek

self-control, though in tumultuous days this is blessed, but a religious affinity draws the modern poets to that mighty pagan past.

To many modern imaginations, the two thousand years of Christianity seem a parenthesis in the world's story, a dream that is fading away. We who awake from dream need help to find our sanity, in the actual world: where can we look more eagerly than to a civilization, perfect and supreme, built up not on mystic delusion but on natural fact? The return to the ancient attitude towards life is not only an emotional luxury, but to many minds a serious necessity if we are to be loyal to experience.

Greek civilization as seen through modern eyes appears to build up its haughty, blithe placidity upon the law of sacrifice. Cease restless questioning of vacancy; content thyself within the limits of the human and the known. "Because thou must not dream, thou needst not then despair." Such are the injunctions of Empedocles for Pausanias, the "good, friendly man" who is to return to the daily life of the city. Does the message satisfy Empedocles or his creator?

For Pausanias, it suffices; for Empedocles, it fails. "A naked, eternally restless mind," devoid of peace, devoid of hope, weary of action, the thinker precipitates himself upon the Final Mystery, and, plunging into the red-hot crater of Ætna, sets at naught his own philosophy. Suicide, the escape from life, is the end of his gospel of limitation.

Half reluctantly, as it were, the meditative and dignified neo-paganism of Arnold ends in sadness and death. But it is in Swinburne, not in Arnold, that the neo-pagan movement becomes charged with religious fervor and reaches a defiant climax. He is most passionately and completely pagan. The restricted and sorrowful gospel of Christianity is intensely repugnant to the immense sensuous and æsthetic vitality of the poet, whose one cry is the glorification of natural freedom: —

> "Wilt thou take all, Galilean? But these thou shalt not take:
> The laurel, the palms and the pæan, the breasts of the nymphs in the brake."[1]

Arnold and Swinburne, strangely different in imaginative make-up and ethical temper, meet in their paganism. But the paganism of Arnold is regretful; that of Swinburne is exultant. To Arnold, Christianity is a fair dream lost: to Swinburne a horror escaped. Instinctively Christian, Arnold adopted the pagan interpretation of life with reluctant yet deliberate decision: instinctively pagan, Swinburne recognized Christianity only that he might denounce. The fine drama "Atalanta in Calydon," modeled severely on the Greek, supreme in reproduction of classic beauty and classic sentiment, marks surely the climax of neo-paganism among the modern poets. And this drama carries the religious ideal of our neo-paganism farther even than it is carried by Arnold, farther indeed than it was ever carried by

[1] *Hymn to Proserpine.*

the reticent Greek. All the elements here coexist in perfect unison. Nowhere is the pure-tinted statuesque beauty of the Greek more perfectly rendered than in Swinburne's pictures. Atalanta, maid-huntress, "rose-colored and cold like very dawn, golden and godlike," stands with her hounds in leash statue-fair. Young Meleager, companion of Jason, has stepped from a Pan-Athenaic procession; and his energy, religious in simplicity and sweet, strong life, breathes the spirit of the Spring. Althæa the matron is truly of the race of Clytemnestra, a grand and sombre figure, shadowed by the wings of Fate. The details of the poem in dialogue and description, are rendered with a finish exquisitely Greek. The ethical outlook also, the very attitude of the old drama, is preserved with scrupulous truthfulness. But it is the religious ideal which pervades the ethics and gives point to the beauty of the "Atalanta in Calydon." And this ideal is bitter with the bitterness of death. For the central theme is the violation of law, and the inexorable nemesis that follows: the futility of rebellion, the supremacy of fate. In every character, a nemesis-action is worked out, final and severe. Atalanta, in her perpetual maidenhood, denies the law of woman, and brings woe upon her friends. The will of Meleager, set towards her in opposition to the gods, slays his uncles: yet these, by their unbridled arrogance, have wrought also their own doom. All the characters, by action and by passion, cry out upon a retribution not slow to visit them.

But behind all these minor sins lies the sombre doom of Althæa, the fated woman who has sought in vain to thwart the gods, and who by their ruthless irony is driven to become herself her instrument of vengeance. The brand is thrown upon the fire, the life of the hero son wastes away, and the great doom is accomplished. The calm faith of Atalanta, the sweet, audacious optimism of Meleager, springing from youth in the blood, serve but as foils for the lurid, smoke-darkened passion with which the Queen recognizes the futility of struggle and the necessity of fate. The great drama sweeps onward, its current mightily swift because held within steepest banks of dramatic law, and the choruses, among Swinburne's most marvelous lyrical achievements, give the attitude of man towards nature, human life, love, God, and fate and death. It is an attitude of rebellion against the most high gods, silenced by despair. The central chorus, chanted at the moment of seeming promise, preserves, in grand melodies that enhance its terror, Swinburne's conception of the final word of man, flung upward towards the heavens: —

"Thou hast sent us sleep, and smitten sleep with dreams,
Saying, joy is not, but love of joy shall be;
Thou hast made sweet springs for all the pleasant streams,
In the end thou hast made them bitter with the sea;
Thou hast fed one rose with dust of many men,
Thou hast marred one face with fire of many tears;
Thou hast taken love, and given us sorrow again;
With pain thou hast filled us full to the eyes and ears.
Therefore, because thou art strong, our father, and we
Feeble; and thou art against us, and thine hand

Constrains us in the shallows of the sea
And breaks us at the limits of the land;
. . . . . .
"Because thou art over all who are over us,
Because thy name is life and our name death;
Because thou art cruel and men are piteous,
And our hands labor and thine hand scattereth, —
Lo with hearts rent and knees made tremulous,
Lo with ephemeral lips and casual breath,
At least we witness of thee ere we die
That these things are not otherwise, but thus —
That each man in his heart sigheth, and saith
That all men, even as I,
All we are against thee, against thee, O God most high."

Through all the serene beauty of the drama, the horror of pitiful rebellion and pitiless law glimmers and flashes like the fateful firelight down the pillars of the long Greek dwelling, and the music sinks away at last with low wail into silence: —

"Who shall contend with his lords,
Or cross them or do them wrong?
Who shall bind them as with cords?
Who shall tame them as with song?
Who shall smite them as with swords?
For the hands of their kingdom are strong."

The Result.

Empedocles, unconsoled by his serene philosophy of the attainable, leaps into the crater. Althæa passes into silence. Meleager is consumed as a brand. How far is this sorrowful message genuinely Greek?

The answer would carry us far, — perhaps beyond the knowledge of any modern man. Yet we may surely see that through our neo-pagan art there sounds a new asperity, and upon it rests a new

shadow. The blitheness of genuine Hellenism was instinctive, not defiant; its delight in the natural life was untainted by any sense of exile from a greater glory. The reverence of the Greek, moreover, would of necessity prevent such amazing outpour of the sense of wrong, such railing against law and life as quivers and flames through the poetry of the Atalanta. Blasphemy was abhorrent to Greek taste as to Greek faith, and the poetry of Greece actually possesses that high calm of which our neo-pagan poetry laments the absence.

Yet our poets give us, perhaps, logical deduction of modern thought from the premises of the past. The profound but tranquil sorrow of Arnold, the tumultuous rebellion of Swinburne, must perhaps in the modern world be the result of life shut in upon itself for inspiration. That mingled awe and hatred of Fate which Swinburne expresses with the rush of overweening eloquence, the old Greek hinted now and then in words few, abrupt, yet deeply significant. A profound fatalism is at the heart of Greek tragedy, that most burning flower of Hellenic genius. A constant reach outward into the unknown, constantly checked by a recognition of its hopelessness, is the story of Greek philosophy. That which was latent and half-unconscious in the elder world has become tragically conscious, openly expressed, in our own day; and the poet who seeks most thoroughly to return to the standards and visions of the past, sees most clearly its vacuity for the spirit.

The pagan reversion, as expressed in our poetry, began in joy; but it has ended in sorrow. At first imaginative rather than ethical, the movement towards Hellenism was charged with the myth-making impulse of the youth of the race, instinctive, joyous, and buoyant. As time goes on, it has become infused with a graver thought, a more conscious purpose. Its votaries turn to the past from reasoned conviction, seeking, amid the tension of varying emotions and conflicting creeds, steadiness and strength from the noble teaching of Greek ethics. As the moral attitude becomes accented, external beauty is less emphasized, so that the subdued Hellenism of Arnold is of a quite different type from the delighted and unrestrained Hellenism of Keats. Finally, in Swinburne, paganism becomes not only conscious but defiant. The passion for natural beauty, spontaneous in Keats as the breathing of a sleeping child, becomes in the later poet a fierce manifesto. He renews with passionate intention the Greek impulse to make the most of this brief span of sunlit existence. The spirit being denied, the flesh asserts its mastery, and the sensuousness of Keats, which is æsthetic, becomes the sensuousness of Swinburne, which is natural. Moderation and self-restraint are still preached as a necessary attitude; but the law, religiously revered by Arnold as the ultimate fact of the universe, becomes to Swinburne a bitter fate, to be obeyed indeed, but also to be cursed.

Whatever may be true of the civilization of

Greece, our modern paganism leads to pain. The eternal strife between flesh and spirit it seeks to escape by repression of the spirit, and the strong mastery of the flesh subdues it, or the agony of thwarted prayer and love unfulfilled invades its peace. Rest in the serene glory of the past is impossible to a generation that has beheld, though in vision only, a greater light.

### 3. *The Mediæval Revival*

The Banishment of Eros.

On the side of a small Italian mountain clings still a little town, gray, innocent, and ancient, which may well seem the centre of mediævalism. Here in Assisi was the birthplace of St. Francis, purest adept in the art of living, as conceived by the thirteenth century; here, in the churches built above his tomb and covered with frescoes by Cimabue and Giotto, is the birthplace of the Christian art of Italy. The sombre lower church, symbol of the earthly life of the saint, conveys at first only a sense of wide arches, dark and low, opening into mystery and silence. Slowly great pictures gather themselves out of the gloom, and reveal over and over, in solemn hint and symbol, the mysteries of the Catholic faith. Here St. Francis weds Poverty, a dread bride, spirit-wan, treading among thorns, yet with that in her hollow face which might hold a man to her forever; while lines of serious angels, with shimmering, dove-like wings, stand lovely and worshipful, witnesses to the strange bridal. Here Obedience, a bowed and aged figure, pale

with utter patience of submission, places the yoke over the head of a monk. Here the saint, kneeling emaciated in the wilderness, stretches his arms towards a shining Form — crucified, yet enfolded with golden wings of triumph and of power — that bends from the dark sky, and gazes on him with eyes which find their own image in the upturned eyes below. Again and again on these walls the Lord is crucified. His blessed life and that of His follower is told in work that, through all stiffness and childishness of technique, reveals might of spiritual imagination unsurpassed. If from broken temple and mutilated statues the full glory of Greece strikes home to our alien hearts, far more perfectly may the entire ideal of the Middle Ages be reconstructed from the walls of this church.

At one side of Giotto's great fresco of Chastity, he has painted for us the Greek Eros, — a naked youth, fair of body, with blindfold eyes, his quiver by his side. He is dowered with rosy wings, and every line is full of the grace of adolescence. But his lovely limbs end in yellow talons, sharp, scaly, vulture-like. He flees downward, a shrinking, exquisite figure, before the menacing presence of four great angels, grave, still, and pure, who hold towards him with solemn harmony of gesture the cords and knives of penance. On their faces is stamped conquest, and in the severe folds of their long garments, as in their noble, drooping wings and on their mature foreheads, may be read the new word, Renunciation.

Thus the Middle Ages banished Eros to the abyss; knowing him fair, believing him evil as blind. In our own world there are many in like manner to banish the fair genius of Greece. Neo-paganism has moved towards self-destruction. The modern spirit, still wandering as exile through the past, has sought in other civilizations than the classic a more enduring home.

The mediæval revival of the nineteenth century is yet more distinctive than the pagan reversion. The eighteenth century had known at least a spurious classical revival, but the Middle Ages were to it a book not only sealed but despised. That which was barbarous to the Augustan age is sacred to the Victorian. Beginning even before our own century with the impulse towards romanticism that culminated in Scott, the mediæval reaction deepened into spiritual comprehension in the ecclesiastical movement of the thirties, and became vivid with æsthetic and emotional sympathy in the pre-Raphaelite movement a little later. Unlike neo-paganism, the influence of the Middle Ages has been more operative in architecture and painting than in poetry. Its full power, indeed, is less manifest in art than in life; for a spirit is with us, as with the early Franciscans, which drives men forth from luxury to a common life with the ignorant and the despoiled. Such a spirit, absorbed in the deed, has as yet found no outcome in art. Yet, though our mediæval reversion be rather direct than æsthetic, many modern poems owe inspiration, technique, or subject to the Middle

Ages. A group of these poems, full of interest and charm, suggests to us the nineteenth century as at once critic and disciple of the thirteenth.

Two controlling factors gave the mediæval ideal life and breath: asceticism and chivalry. The two were never far apart. If asceticism finds its fullest pictorial expression at Assisi, many an early Italian picture lends form and color to the ideal of knighthood. The mailed archangels of Signorelli stand actual among substantial clouds, while the young knights of Perugino in their shining armor are vainly endued with the heroic ancient names that suit so ill their pensive Christian courage. The knight and the ascetics, types equally remote from the pagan world, attract equally the modern poets. Chivalry is first in the field, and round its shining pomp gathers much of the delight of the early romantic movement. Knight, not ascetic, quickened the healthy fancy of Scott; and the wholesome vigor of his delineations proves perpetual happiness for that modern knight, as Lanier calls him, the genuine boy. Yet Scott, ignoring the mystical element in the Middle Ages, could not enter their true spirit. His brilliant work springs from outward love of movement and picture rather than from deep affinity. Coleridge and Wordsworth, in "Christabel" and "The White Doe of Rylstone," suggest a more vital insight.

Asceticism, Chivalry, and their modern Interpreters.

But it was later that the vague romantic movement was to shape itself into a genuine mediæval

revival. It was to be vivified and strengthened by the deep sense of spiritual wonder inherent in the new democracy; it was also to be informed by the new scholarship with its gift of definite knowledge. Such processes take time. Only in the Victorian age has the romantic spirit, becoming critical and conscious, turned deliberately to a revival of mediæval methods and ideals.

Clough and Arnold ignore mediæval themes. Browning seldom touches them, though the virile handling of "A Heretic's Tragedy" shows what power might have been his. All the other Victorians sooner or later, in degree greater or less, kindle their imagination at mediæval altars.

Landor is our purest exponent of neo-paganism, true son of antiquity strayed into the modern world. We have a poet who holds precisely the same place in the mediæval revival. Cardinal Newman towers with only three or four compeers above his generation; and now that the benignity of his great nature has passed from our sight, its majesty is more evident year by year. But Newman is no child of his own age, though he was one of its leaders. He belongs to the Middle Ages, not by his imagination, but by his very personality. If Scott is all chivalry, Newman is all asceticism. Pure mystic speaks in him, the mystic who has not even seen the warrior. His longest poem, the "Dream of Gerontius," is a study of the experience of the Catholic soul after death. No one who has felt the keen touch of that poem upon the hidden spirit could venture to call it

archaic. But it is modern only because eternal, as the Confessions of Augustine are modern. Only by accident does the nineteenth rather than the thirteenth century give it birth. Cardinal Newman is in one sense apart even from the mediæval revival: he is simply a true son of the past.

One of our minor poets, Charles Kingsley, did his best work when inspired by the Middle Ages. His chief poem, "A Saint's Tragedy," is a lovely if weak study of mediæval life.

But it is with the pre-Raphaelite poets, Rossetti, Swinburne, and Morris, that we find an important school, consciously dedicated to the revival of the past. "Studies in the Art Catholic" the fervid young Gabriel Rossetti called his first fugitive poems; and it was in the assumption of an archaic and Catholic manner that the group of painters and later of poets who clustered round him found their distinctive note. The atmosphere in which their work is steeped is that of the thirteenth century, rather than the smoky, bracing air of our own day. Their translations from early French and Italian are needless witnesses to their enthusiasm for the mediæval past.

And yet, when the final history of this curious and fascinating movement of the imagination comes to be written, it will perhaps be seen that the central affinity of the movement in its maturity was not with the Middle Ages; the epithet pre-Raphaelite is surely a misnomer for its chief product. Despite their ardent start, it is not one of these poets who is the most constant exponent

of the mediæval revival: it is the poet of the "Idylls of the King."

Very early in the poetic life of Tennyson, a series of brief, delicate poems — the "Lady of Shalott," "Sir Galahad," "St. Agnes' Eve," "St. Simeon Stylites" — showed that the glamour of the Middle Ages was upon him. His early classical studies were, as we have seen, few, and they were never followed. Abandoning them for a mightier spell, Tennyson gave himself to weaving upon an old heroic cycle of the Middle Ages his fairest imaginative broidery. The cycle of the "Idylls of the King," in its complete form, must be ranked as the chief mediæval reversion of the century. The story may be Keltic and the handling modern: we may for our own private pleasure prefer the rough, insouciant, tender narrative of old Sir Thomas Malory; but the ordinary modern English world gets from the pages of Tennyson its ideal of knighthood. Newman, Kingsley, Rossetti, Morris, Swinburne, are all of them in greater or less degree shaped and penetrated by the influence of the Middle Ages; but no one of them has rendered its ideals vivid and intelligible to the world so successfully and fully as the poet of Lancelot and Guinevere, of Merlin and Elaine and Galahad, and of King Arthur.

Attraction and Repulsion.

As we pass from our neo-pagan poetry to the poetry of the mediæval revival, there is a change in the very quality of the air. Suave quietude has fled, and a rough wind strikes

our cheeks. With Œnone, beautiful-browed, we have lingered on the mountain-forest, and have beheld the celestial vision where the crocus broke like flame at the feet of Aphrodite, and the pearly shoulder of Pallas gleams against the pines. We pass to the pillar where a hideous old man stricken with sore disease,

"In coughs, aches, stitches, ulcerous throes and cramps,"

cries aloud out of his morbid craze. From hillside and ocean-shore, haunted by fair forms roaming in sweet freedom and naked glory, we are transported to the cloister and the pallet, the harsh robe and the dying prayer. Even in the later phases of neo-paganism, where pain and question have invaded the instinctive joy in natural good, and possess the secret life, all outward forms are still haughty in beauty and move with untroubled calm. Empedocles in his melancholy, Althæa in her passion, are fair and stately still. In the poetry of the mediæval revival, loveliness, even when admitted, is fraught with unrest and pain. Scarred with the knight, or emaciated with the monk, we fight or we aspire. Place beside Landor's "Hellenics" the "Dream of Gerontius;" beside "Hyperion" Kingsley's "Saint's Tragedy;" beside Tennyson's "Œnone," his "St. Agnes' Eve." Here still is beauty, but beauty of a new order. Cardinal Newman has a tender story of a young Greek girl, converted from her pagan calm, her self-sufficing loveliness, and dying the death of a Christian martyr. Her confessor notes the change in her appearance: "He could hardly

keep from tears of pain or of joy or of both when he saw the great change which trial had wrought in her. What touched him most was the utter disappearance of that majesty of mien which once was hers, a gift so beautiful, so unsuitable to fallen man. There was instead of it a frank humility, a simplicity without concealment, an unresisting meekness which seemed as if it would enable her, if trampled on, to smile, and to kiss the feet that insulted her. She had lost every vestige of what the world worships under the title of proper pride and self-respect. Callista was now living, not in the thought of herself, but of Another." In like manner our modern poets find impossible sustained loyalty to the Greek ideal. Against their will romanticism invades them, and whispers of imperfection, humility, and desire. Beside a saint, even a goddess is insipid. Tennyson and Keats, despite their frank passion for natural beauty, lapse perpetually into fullness of color and subtlety of style. Even Arnold and Swinburne unconsciously adopt the mystical and suggestive, and adumbrate in their very epithets a halo of unspoken meanings. The unfulfilled allures us, and the spell of Christian civilization is too strong for the modern man. For the word of Hellas was sanity, but the word of the Middle Ages was faith; and the world of to-day, though it seek satisfaction in the first word, is forever haunted by the second. When our poets yield fully to the spell of the Middle Ages, the beauty which floats before their sight is that of a nun on the Eve of St. Agnes, spirit-

pure, her frail flesh worn till almost translucent like the moonlit snowdrop upon her breast. Kingsley, in a tiny poem which is an illumination in itself, tells us the place of the fair natural world in the mediæval ideal: —

> "I would have loved: there are no mates in heaven;
> I would be great: there is no pride in heaven;
> I would have sung as doth the nightingale,
> The summer's night beneath the moonè pale,
> But saintès' hymns alone in heaven prevail.
> My love, my song, my skill, my high intent,
> Have I within this seely book y-pent;
> And all that beauty which from every part
> I treasured still alway within my heart —
> Whether of form or face angelical,
> Or herb or flower or lofty cathedral —
> Upon these sheets below doth lie y-spread
> In quaint devices deftly blazonèd.
> Lord, in this tome to Thee I sanctify
> The simple fruits of worldly fantasy."

One might suppose that in an age which cannot quite escape faith, poetry inspired by Christian ages would be stronger than that shaped by the classic world. It is not so. Neo-paganism may end in death, but the poetry of the mediæval reaction begins and ends in weakness; it is slight in substance and feeble in fibre. Our neo-pagan poetry is a small literature in itself; this is an occasional side-issue. Keats is pure Hellene and Swinburne has never surpassed "Atalanta," but no poet except Newman is mediæval at his height. Our mediæval poetry is no expression of an inner life; it is a series of studies in a remote though interesting time. We cannot conceal from our-

selves in the Idylls that these knights are no real heroes of a real age of chivalry, careless, religious, brutal, and gay, but the Moral Virtues and Vices parading around the Prince Consort. Rossetti is masquerading in the garb of Dante: his exquisite creations are nothing but feelings, dressed in dream-raiment cut after the fashion of the past. Of wholesome, sincere, unlabored renderings of mediæval life, our modern English poets can show not one.

We said that in our poetic mediæval revival we could watch the nineteenth century as at once disciple and critic of the thirteenth. If this be so, the critic gets the better of the disciple. Our English poets condemn the mediæval ideal even while they depict it. And, Arnold to the contrary notwithstanding, poetry which is criticism can never be whole-souled.

The neo-pagan poet is in full though not always in joyous sympathy with his subject; he yields himself to the ideal that he describes. The mediæval poet never surrenders. "Empedocles" expresses the real belief of Arnold; "St. Simeon Stylites" is a study in self-delusion. "Endymion" is the loving image of a bright world fled; the "Saint's Tragedy" is an avowed criticism of the monastic ideal of womanhood. The Middle Ages allure our poets away with mighty charm from the spell of Greece: at the same time they repel the imagination and drive it to a hostile attitude.

The severe "ascêsis" of the Greeks was to the

end of a natural perfection: the asceticism of the Middle Ages, more painful and more complete, was to the end of an unearthly holiness. To such asceticism, no child of the new age who is also a child of art can ever yield.

The early poems of Rossetti are the only modern work fully merged in a mediæval theme. And Rossetti preserves sympathy by ignoring fact. The chivalry, in his best poems, as "Staff and Scrip," is indeed suffused with mysticism. Passionate in feeling, devout in symbol, these poems inhabit a dim region in our imagination otherwise desolate; and they seem to bear reproachful witness that their author is as true son of the Middle Age as Newman himself. Yet a sense of hidden want pursues us still. For we miss the note of renunciation. As Scott uses chivalry for pictorial material, Rossetti uses mysticism for emotional stimulus. Of the severe repudiation of the flesh, essential and inherent in the mediæval ideal, his poetry bears no trace. Mysticism without asceticism is the strange quest of his art; and the result, with all its beauty, is historically untrue.

Of our two best exponents of the Middle Ages, the one, Rossetti, thus retains sympathy by ignoring fact. The other, Tennyson, retains truth but forfeits sympathy. In Tennyson's mediæval studies, the two factors, asceticism and chivalry, find full recognition. He is capable of giving us both a Geraint and a St. Simeon, and in many of his characters the two elements blend. The "Holy Grail," the "Cup of Blessing," floats on the wings

of spirit-music over all the jousts and battles of the "Idylls of the King." Sir Galahad, young son of Lancelot, at once ascetic, knight, and seer, is the militant guardian of the most intense faith of his time; and as he rides singing over wold and hill, his lay holds reflected the sphere of mediæval light: —

> "A maiden-knight, to me is given
> Such hope I know not fear;
> I yearn to meet the airs of heaven
> Which often greet me here.
>
> "So pass I hostel, hall, and grange;
> By bridge and ford, by park and pale,
> All armed I ride, whate'er betide,
> Until I find the Holy Grail."

Tennyson understands his age, but he understands it only to condemn. Criticism on the mystic claim which draws men from the world of fact to the world of vision points the moral and spoils the art of the "Idylls of the King." The summons of the Holy Grail disintegrates the Table Round and destroys the noble plan of Arthur. Our best poetic interpreter of the Middle Ages is also their keenest critic.

The classic ideal, seeking a natural perfection, put on one side all that conflicted with its harmony. The mediæval, seeking a spiritual promise, aspired through the denial of the flesh. Many a poet and thinker, wearied with eternal strife, has flung himself, with the cumulative force of natural instinct and developed will, full on the pagan ideal: no poet or thinker touched to modernness

can with entire abandon return to the mediæval. Too strong is our realism, our faith in the world of actual, visible nature and men. We may deny the spirit if we will, but it is only in sporadic and uncharacteristic moments that the age of science can deny the senses. The harmonious synthesis between flesh and spirit is not reached, either by the votaries of paganism or by the students of mediævalism: was there no other way?

### 4. *The Spirit of the Renaissance*

The fifteenth century saw a classical reaction as marked as our own, though less scholarly and less profound; and the "Faerie Queene" alone would witness to the power of the traditions of chivalry in the Middle Ages. But there is one reversion to the past in which the nineteenth century is unique: it is the reversion to the first renaissance.

There is no other revival, in the Victorian age, so full of vigorous enjoyment. In the time of the revolutionary poets, indeed, Keats's "Eve of St. Agnes" stands alone as a glowing example of the renaissance spirit. But in our more complex and conscious time, this most complex of the civilizations of the past has drawn our poets to itself with mighty power. A great body of our poetry deals directly with themes of the Italian renaissance; a still greater body receives inspiration and coloring from the same period. Arnold and Clough alone leave it untouched. Tennyson in one fine and unique poem, "The Palace of Art," sums up its

essence. The poem is an excursion in his work. But Rossetti when not mediæval, Swinburne when not pagan, are far more truly sons of the Italian renaissance than of the England of factories and steam. Rossetti, when the Catholic fervor of youth is over, moves forward in sympathy and method from the century of St. Francis to the century of Leonardo. Swinburne opens his work with the "Laus Veneris," and the painful and powerful rendering of the great legend of the renaissance gives the key to his central temper; while for type of beauty and sentiment, Morris, whatever his subject may be, turns to the same age. The revival of the renaissance in these poets may be likened to the strong enthusiasm for chivalry and feudalism in Ariosto, Tasso, and Spenser, — at once a continuous afterglow from the period itself and the light of a new kindred dawn. Near enough for genuine fellowship in sentiment, they are far enough for the charm and glamour of romance.

But it is not only the echo-poets, as we might call them, who have passed under the spell of this great age. One poet of sympathies massive and large is, so far as we can tell, unerring in his interpretation of the time. As Arnold and Swinburne show an instinct especially pagan, as Tennyson is the fullest interpreter of the Middle Ages, so Browning is peculiarly the poet of the Italian renaissance. Ruskin's familiar praise of "The Bishop at St. Praxed's" might be extended to all the poems of this period, so vital, so passion-

ate, so learned, so spontaneous. From the first dawn of the new feeling as signaled in "Old Masters in Florence," through its glorious noon reflected in "Fra Lippo Lippi," "The Grammarian's Funeral," and countless brilliant poems, to the last faint scholastic twilight as caught by the Lawyers in "The Ring and The Book," Browning has led us through the changes of the long renaissance day.

Æsthetic Naturalism.

As Giotto painted the Middle Ages at Assisi, so Raphael painted the Renaissance on the walls of the Papal palace at Rome. In these gracious frescoes, Art and Learning are glorified. Here debonair muses cluster around the lightsome youthful Apollo, while the poets gather near in grand delight. Here on an adjoining wall, philosophers and students, old and young together, manifest the happy harmony of thought.

The first renaissance, startled from its heaven-gazing, looked around upon the earth, and behold! it was very good. It glowed with beauty, wonderful, rich, and new, with knowledge and the joy thereof. "How good is man's life, the mere living," became the cry of the age, a cry modulated to varying cadence in buildings, pictures, and poems. It is not hard to see why the renaissance should have strong fascination for the poets of our own day. Times of rapid and vast development of material luxury and scientific enthusiasm, their formative conditions are the same. In the roaming impulse of the spirit, in the insatiable desire

for all knowledge and all beauty, in the intoxicating sense of new freedom, the two ages are akin.

To-day again the spirit of reaction is abroad; hardly reaction against the past, since no ages of faith lie directly behind us, but against phases of thought contemporary and vital. For we, the summary of time, hold simultaneously in our one great moment all which preceding ages, "piecemeal or in succession," have revealed. If an instinctive paganism is among us, we have also a fervent Christianity, which finds faint and imperfect expression in the mediæval revival of art. There is an impulse, define it how we will, driving its votaries from the fine and subtle luxury of inward culture and outward beauty to a region of sympathies where the fair sorrows of the imagination can never enter, because the sorrow of actual physical want has the right of way. Against this impulse of renunciation, semi-democratic and semi-Christian, the children of our new renaissance ardently rebel. Renunciation is abhorrent to them, and the enrichment of life is their cry. In the fullness of art, they seek the fullness of joy, that in our fleeting years we may catch so much as may be of the world's best gifts. It is this superb reaching-out for the glory of life that quivers from the first renaissance to our own, as a sympathetic chord vibrates through space. Browning catches the vibration for us with splendid clearness and harmony in the Credo, defiant and buoyant, of his artist-monk: —

> "You 've seen the world, —
> The beauty and the wonder and the power,
> The shapes of things, their colors, lights and shades,
> Changes, surprises, — and God made it all!
> For what? Do you feel thankful, ay or no?
> . . . This world 's no blot to us,
> Nor blank — it means intensely, and means good;
> To find its meaning is my meat and drink." [1]

To find the full meaning of the world by the evolution of the fullest consciousness, to enrich and quicken our few and languid years by the beauty of the present and all the varied gains of the fair past, — such is the aim of the renaissance of our latter days, as it was the aim, less conscious, of the fifteenth century. Inaugurated by Goethe, the impulse has become more inclusive than ever before, since informed by more varied knowledge and drawing upon a broader past. It breathes through all the poetic movement of reversion which we are studying, and finds not only expression but sanction in the theory which makes living in itself the end of life, and demands as highest good variety and condensation of sensation. "Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end," writes an apostle of the new renaissance. "A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy? "To burn always with this hard,

[1] *Fra Lippo Lippi.*

gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life."

Thus the æstheticism which was the unconscious inspiration of the splendor of the first renaissance has become in large measure the conscious formative principle of our own.

Æstheticism and Dissatisfaction.

The peculiar and distinctive character of the first renaissance arose rather from the fusion than from the creation of ideas. It beheld no absolutely new vision, as did the early Christians; its superb originality resulted from its dynamic union of the visions of ages past. Subtle and audacious in thought, it saw as through receding transparencies the ideals of successive times blended in one confused yet glorious whole. The passion for life drew men then as now to that civilization in which the art of living reached highest perfection, and the eager rediscovery of the ancient world was cause as well as effect of the strong movement towards naturalism. But classical studies of the age, unlike our own, form no separate phase of art. They mingle in delightful simplicity with the genuine and direct expressions of the life of the times, and with the varying forms of that great Christian art which continues after all to be produced in unbroken tradition. The serene beauty of the Madonna still held the hearts of men, and Biblical pictures in their solemn Hebraic gloom still haunted the mental vision. Full return to pagan ideals was impossible; nor did the men of the renaissance wish for it. The

celestial visions of Christianity were too closely interwoven with their lives. Thus it happened that Artemis, Aphrodite, and Apollo arose from their long sleep, and with strange, white, surprised beauty found themselves confronting a crucifix or a martyrdom. The grave yet joyous harmony of Raphael's "Parnassus" and "School of Athens" are in no wise incommoded by the "Triumph of the Christian Faith," facing them upon the opposite wall. Perugino, master of Raphael, lived at the exact point where the light of the Middle Ages and that of the early renaissance blend. He covered the chamber where met the fortunate merchants of Perugia with high thoughts and noble forms. Placing at one end the Transfiguration as the triumph of faith and the Nativity as the triumph of love, he ranged the heroes of antiquity in the guise of Christian knights along the sides of the splendid room, and innocently adorned the ceiling with the slim juvenile grace of Diana, Mercury, and Venus.

And after all it is this wide eclecticism, frank and free, that has fullest parallel in our own day. But the eager temper could not long remain joyous and serene.

The renaissance gladly welcomed what elements of beauty it found existing in the Christian legend or the Christian ideal. There were other elements in Christianity abhorrent to it. Pain of body and soul, the agonized struggle for righteousness, the sternness of the moral law, — all this it strove to escape, but the effort was in vain. Against this

dark background shone the loveliness of the saints; remove it, and their shining forms vanished into dim monotony. To the serene pagan exclusion of all that was dark and bitter, the renaissance could not return. It inherited ages of teaching alien in deepest spirit to the temperate joy in natural good. Centuries of sorrow lay behind it; sorrow, tempered with keen yearning after a supernatural ideal, shot through with strange gladness, consecrated to a lofty service. Men might aim at the representation of a heathen image; but through the wan faces of their goddesses there gleamed the pain of an infinite desire, and the full, lovely curves of limb in the Greek statues were replaced by the emaciated grace of an ascetic ideal. They might try to tell a classic story; but their efforts resulted in the weird sadness of a Tannhaüser-legend, symbol of the renaissance itself, enticed from the light of day to the cave of Lady Venus, enthralled yet haunted by dim memories ending in eternal remorse. Nowhere in the deeper art of the renaissance do we find absolute contentment or absolute beauty. Into all happiness is breathed the note of plaintive desire: on all the beauty there rests the cloud of yearning sorrow. Equally remote from the temperance of the Greek and the asceticism of the monk, its art is characterized by the enthusiastic reproduction of all that it can perceive. It strove to unite the ideals of Greece and of Christendom; and despite itself, its highest ideal of beauty shone with the melancholy lustre of pain.

And here most perfectly the first renaissance is

prototype of our own. The school that steeps itself most consciously in the renaissance utilizes sorrow as a painter utilizes gloom. With faces passion-charged and mystery-clouded, its women belong to the world of Botticelli, where a grave secret dims all the gayety and grace of youth. Rossetti's ballads, with their exquisite elaboration of feeling and their treatment of sin itself as a supreme æsthetic motif, are of the fifteenth-century spirit. Even the fleshly passion of Swinburne, when not controlled by conscious Hellenism, is charged with a wavering intensity and eternal yearning foreign to the classic ideal. It is the presence of sorrow, of sin, of coming death, — a presence seldom deliberately recognized but never evaded, — which gives to all this school of poets distinctive character and peculiar charm. In their possession there is still a further reach of longing. The shadow of the first renaissance, a Venetian shadow, full of color deep and sad, falls upon them. Into the light of modern day they never enter, but rest within the shadow, which tones all images to its own lovely but unnatural hue.

The note of sadness which sounds through the poetry of the æsthetic school is lost to us as we listen to the ringing music of Browning; but it is replaced by the note of criticism. No poet has given so vivid and robust studies in the great period as the revealer of Andrea del Sarto: none has been so wholesomely drawn by its humanist ardor, its passion for knowledge, beauty, and love.

Certain aspects of the time, as its love of learning, Browning alone has rendered; and in all his renaissance poems, it is the eclecticism and the aspiration of the age together on which he loves to dwell. Yet, well though he loves the renaissance, he is never subjugated by it. His brilliant studies leave us aware that he is held within the protection of a wider faith. His Duke and Bishop, dilettante still, the one before the image of his dead wife, the other on his deathbed, are touched with keenest satiric humor; and the poet from first to last is severe judge as well as genial revealer.

From Morris to Browning: the very variety of temperaments which have felt the spell witnesses to the spiritual affinity of the renaissance and ourselves. But it is Tennyson who in one iridescent poem, "The Palace of Art," gives us the quintessence of the æsthetic ideal. The poem is a summary of all that the first renaissance uttered, of all that our narrower movement has sought to say. The glorious soul surrounds herself with all material delights of the senses, with all stimulus from nature and from art. Literature, history, philosophy, enlighten her; every religion, Christian, Mohammedan, Roman and Greek and Oriental, lend their fair mythology to bring her joy.

> "Holding no form of creed,
> But contemplating all,"

theology itself ministered to her self-satisfaction, Tennyson tells us. Even so fell the first renaissance. But of the renaissance of these later days, the end is not yet shown.

For the renaissance, Eros no longer fled trembling and talon-footed before the face of God's grave angels. In the frescoes of Raphael, he "holds his dear Psyche sweet entranced," and natural love and spiritual impulse are for one brief moment wed.

The Marriage of Cupid and Psyche.

But for one brief moment only. The glory of the renaissance did not endure. In its union of varying elements there was no coherence of inward life. It dwindled into formalism, and passed away in the external glitter of the eighteenth century.

Its quest was indeed the union of Cupid and Psyche, the synthesis of flesh and soul. It clung with defiance to the flesh; it was held with invisible bonds to the spirit. Its art had neither that surrender of beauty which marks the extreme phases of the Middle Ages, nor the serene ignoring of the incomplete which marks the Greek. It sought to harmonize the glory of the natural life with the yearning for a spiritual ideal.

Half conscious in the earlier renaissance, this union has become the deliberate craving and search of many of our later poets. Scientific and realistic, we are yet mystical; wedded to material luxury, we demand and seek in wild experiments to press out into transcendental life. Imbued like the renaissance with the passion of humanism, we, too, raise from the dead ideals long wrapt in deathlike sleep. Unable to reject the flesh, unable to ignore the spirit, we, too, fling our power into an attempt at synthesis. The quest of the ages has never been more intensely conscious than with us.

The first renaissance failed. Nor can our modern renaissance long hold us. There is conflict and not peace between the two ideals forced into violent and reluctant fellowship: the women of Rossetti are too full-lipped for the saint, too deep-eyed for Aphrodite, and the man who interprets the first renaissance most clearly is its severest judge. The mighty effort at synthesis is not likely to cease with our generation; but the word of union, in the art that seeks to return to the fifteenth century, is not yet found.

### 5. *The Outcome*

We reach the question towards which all our studies have been moving, Can the home of a modern spirit be found in return to the past?

It has been earnestly sought there. From the beginning of the century, though more strongly in the Victorian age, a mighty impulse has swept our poets away from the turmoil and sordidness of the present towards some ideal past civilization which "still lives," as Blake tells us that all things live "in the human imagination." A mighty impulse has swept them to the past: a mightier impulse has borne them back again into uncompromising modernness, into the very thick of actual life. Spiritual restlessness drives them away: spiritual restlessness, unsatisfied forever in any region of the sheltered past, blows them forth once more out into the wind-swept, bracing world. The strong impulse of romance entices them to unfamiliar fields, mysterious and dim with the charm of the unknown:

the stronger impulse towards realism drives them back again, to seek stimulus and inspiration in the wider mystery of the familiar. Only one school, the school of the Dreamers, remains contentedly apart from the modern world. Keats and his children after the imagination — Rossetti, Swinburne, Morris — deliberately sunder themselves from what lies around them and take refuge in fair ghosts whose very warmth of color is illusion — shadow, not substance. Even among these poets Rossetti is at times borne out upon the surges of actual passion, Swinburne finds no rest in any past, roaming from mythical Greece to modern England, while Morris in these later years has impatiently shaken himself free from the clinging loveliness of dreamland and flung himself full on the brutal facts of the Socialist propaganda. As for our greater poets, they, with no other exception, give their full power, the entire weight and force of their genius, not to revivals of the past, but to entirely modern work. The reproductions of the past are a side issue in the work of Wordsworth and Shelley, of Arnold and Tennyson and Browning. The whole literary movement towards the past, significant and interesting as it is, is only an eddy in the great onward flow of the river of the imagination.

What is the result of the quest of our poets in the past? Putting the æsthetic interest and value of these revivals aside, how far does the search for a spiritual abiding-place, which is after all their inspiration and reason for being, lead to success?

Neo-paganism, as an interpretation of life, assuredly fails. Joyous, instinctive, and wholly lovely in the work of Keats, it passes into stoicism austere yet wistful in Matthew Arnold, and to open rebellion and bitter fatalism in the poetry of Swinburne.

The mediæval revival cannot satisfy our poets even for an hour. It is half-hearted from the first; literary and critical rather than spontaneous. No poet yields himself to it in frank conviction and contentment, and the imagination studies the period with deep interest, but never enters it.

The affiliation of the renaissance with our own day is more subtle, and seems, at first sight, more complete. Yet surely in this period the modern man would perish of unsatisfied desire. The poets who rest in it are esoteric and exotic; the one man of sunlight and buoyant freedom who is drawn to it, criticises and transcends, even while he reveals, the age.

No one of the great periods to which the poets have turned could satisfy the modern man. For Hellenism seeks to exalt the natural life to undisturbed supremacy and repose; but that supremacy cannot endure. The Middle Ages sought to set the spirit free by annihilation of the flesh, and that annihilation we cannot try. The renaissance fusing violently, though half-reluctantly, the two ideals, accomplished in a way the needed synthesis; yet it failed. It sought to gain in the present world that completeness which the present world can never give; and it emphasized an impossible relation, seeking, however unconsciously,

that soul should minister to flesh rather than flesh to soul. The spiritual, recognized and even strongly present in its ideal, was yet subordinate to the æsthetic; and union on such terms cannot endure. The art of the renaissance, old and new, is fugitive and unstable. We must recognize the Spirit as the basal reality, and we must open life upward into eternity, would we hope that the Hellenic ideal of completeness and the mediæval ideal of aspiration may meet in unity and lead to peace.

Our modern poetry has carried us far; so far that a crude sensuousness, a crude asceticism, are equally impossible to the man of keen and delicate thought. The most superb beauty cannot hold us unless touched with spiritual desire. The joy is characterless in which no pain inheres. No action can satisfy nor rejoice which does not vibrate with moral passion. So much we proclaim through our loftiest souls, we confess through our most reluctant. The completeness of natural good and the fullness of spiritual aspiration must, to satisfy us, meet and blend.

But the perfect union is not found. For still the most refined ideal of the day quivers towards the conviction that spirit may exist for flesh, not flesh for spirit. With the lost soul we exclaim: —

> "Let spirit star the dome
> Of sky, that flesh may need no peak,
> No nook of earth — I shall not seek
> Its service further." [1]

[1] Browning: *Easter Day.*

A conviction, subtle and supreme, invades us, that morality may exist to the end of experience, holiness to the end of beauty; that emotion and art, rather than thought and character, are the goal of thought and prayer. Mysticism and realism have met, but in an enchanted world. Dimly we catch glimpses of another union, where the instincts of the soul and the perceptions of the senses blend in perfect harmony, enduring, active and pure. But within the limits of the poetry of the New Renaissance, the union is not found.

# V

## BROWNING AS A HUMORIST

"THERE is no joke so true and deep in actual life," says Emerson, "as when some pure idealist goes up and down among the institutions of society, attended by a man who knows the world, and who, sympathizing with the philosopher's scrutiny, sympathizes also with the confusion and indignation of the detected skulking institutions. His perception of disparity, his eye wandering perpetually from the rule to the crooked, lying, thieving fact, makes the eyes run over with laughter."

Mephisto and Idealist.

Yes! There is one joke better even than this. It is when the idealist and the man of the world are bound up together within that microcosm known to us as a personality; when, not only side by side, but themselves the two sides of one man, they wander through the cities of the earth and its waste places, during their mortal pilgrimage, each intent on his own vision, yet doomed forever to hear the opposing vision of the other. Here is joke, for there is no incongruity that goes deeper. Here, also, is drama. For in this strangest fellowship one of the comrades must ultimately prevail, must prove himself the Strong Man and control

the vision of his brother. Before that final conquest, what swayings of victory, what subtle passes of weapons! When it is accomplished, what secret flow of the life of the conquered into the very veins of the conqueror! Idealist, or man of the world — which shall it be? Answer — Swift, Rabelais, Cervantes, Browning!

The immense vitality and wide productiveness of Browning demand classification, but the classification is not yet found. Optimist, realist, mystic we may call him if we will, yet all the while we know that the epithet touches only one side of his great and placid nature. His robust versatility serenely defies compression into a phrase. Yet if, with the fatuous affection of mortal man for labels, we insist on knowing by whose side he is to be put, we shall find, I believe, his truest abiding-place if we name him with the great masters of Ironic Art. Humor, and humor tinged with irony, is the most distinctive, if not the most important, element in his genius. Its bitter aroma is never long absent. We believe that we breathe the pure air of the sublime, and a gust of satire slaps us sharply in the face. We feel ourselves wrapt in religious ecstasy; hey! presto! We are in the coarsest region of grotesque.

The world's great humorists are few in number, and most of them, perhaps, write prose. In the freedom of the more realistic art-form, the man of the world finds himself at home. The idealist is likely to have it all his own way in poetry, and pure idealism is never humorous. When the

comic appears in poetry, it is because the idealist is embosomed with the man of the world, so that the breath they draw is one. Chaucer, the earth-child, wholesome and gay; Shakespeare, with that superb dramatic vision which must always be realistic; certain writers of the eighteenth century, through whose shallower realism flashes a wit cold with the north; — these men are humorists. But the purist art of Milton and Spenser is always serious. No music of jesting blends with the multiform harmonies of the "Faerie Queene;" how startling the thought of a hearty laugh from Adam and the Archangel Raphael! The great outburst of poetic idealism at the first of our own century is intensely grave. Peasant-fun and peasant-joyousness bubble through the lilts of Burns; but after his day, gravity settles down upon us. Of the poets of the revolution, only one is ever merry. Wordsworth's Peddler in "The Excursion" assuredly never either made or took a joke; the blitheness of even his Highland girl is too reticent for outward mirth; while Peter Bell and his ass tell us with every bray that they live in a world secure against invasions of laughter. There is no more irony nor absurdity in the poems of Shelley than in the sky at dawn. Coleridge, controlling the supernatural-grotesque, is yet devoid of genuine humor except in one or two political poems. So is Keats, though his seriousness is not moral but æsthetic. One poet, and one alone, of that great early group, can to-day reach our affections through our amusement. If Byron lives, he lives by virtue of wit.

The sorrowful recklessness of his irony bears the stamp of living power, unknown to his heroics or his sentimental tears. Byron alone among his comrades is great as a humorist; for alone among his comrades he was a realist. What he saw was doubtless often unworthy; but it had the merit of existing.

We might expect a strong development of humor in our Victorian poets, since we have all turned realists nowadays. In a time of science, of disillusion, of reverence for fact, our poetry has passed from theories to experiment, and experiment on such queer stuff as actual human life must make us laugh when it does not make us cry. Yet as we think it over, we are tempted to feel that we are growing more and more solemn as we grow old. In the sacred precincts of Arnold's poems, humor would be a Philistine intrusion; the breezes blow sedately here, with no touch of frolic or tumult. Tennyson's Lancelot might laugh, but King Arthur would never catch him at it. Pensive languor is as essential to the pre-Raphaelite heroine as the grin to the Cheshire cat. The cat might vanish, but the grin remained; so all that is earthly and substantial in these dim maidens would melt into air before an honest gaze; but the full curve of sorrow to the lip, the wistful wonder of the eye, would still hover before us. One only of our minor Victorian poets was endowed by nature with a hearty English sense of fun; and Clough's humor, saddened by incessant peering into mysteries, becomes bitter and mock-

ing. Its pungency is not to be forgotten; but Clough's genius was never robust, and his product, slow and slight, hardly interrupts the serious, almost solemn, tenor of our Victorian poetry.

In part, the trouble is with our subjects. When towards the middle of our century men stopped grasping at abstractions and gazing at sunsets, they took to questioning their minds. Now general truths are obviously never humorous, and Nature does not display her glories to stimulate our amusement. Neither is it exhilarating nor funny to "shut our eyes and muse how our own minds are made," as Matthew Arnold describes our pet occupation. The comic, though it may exist in the inner life, eludes capture. Humor belongs to the free objective world of men and women, neither hypostasized to divinity nor attenuated to shadows. This world, with its breadth and variety, was the world of those great naturalists, the Elizabethan dramatists. Few of our modern poets have entered its wide freedom. We sigh or muse or frown as we read them; but alas! we never smile.

Is our poetry, then, to remain hopelessly solemn? Is "Laughter, holding both his sides," to be banished from among us, and Introspection, gazing mournfully into shadows or among memories, to replace him? Let us take comfort! Our most virile poet, our poet of widest outlook over both good and evil, of keenest dramatic instinct, is Robert Browning. And Browning is a magnificent humorist. It could not be otherwise; for

among all our modern poets, he alone abandons himself utterly to naturalism.

Our Victorian poets have many deep and charming qualities. One thing they lack: the breadth, the freedom of life. The reason is clear: their poetry is realistic if you will, but democratic it is not. Their realism is guarded and subjective, not dramatic and free. Clough might have had large freedom, had he not renounced life through seeking truth in the pure idea. The others, even Tennyson, are conscious scholars, conscious artists, before they are unconscious men. Therefore they either write up to a theory or out of a personal and small experience. Not so with Browning. No influence suppresses — we can hardly say that any influence moulds — his strong individuality, yet the spirit of democracy tingles in his form and thought. Not only the child of his age but the embracer of his age, his naturalism is instinctive and unlimited; and naturalism brings humor in its train. Humor is subordinate in the revolutionary poets, for it appears only in the weakest, Byron. Despite the many untouched by it, we may surely say that it is prominent in the Victorians; for it pervades, all but controls, the work of the strongest, Browning.

From Wholes to Parts.

In spite of our large and significant poetry of reversion and our charming poetry of dreams, our modern literature dwells chiefly in the present. It loves best to render the world directly around us — the visible, contemporary Fact. And Brown-

ing is, among Englishmen, most uncompromising student of the Fact. In his humorous naturalism, broad and free as life itself, he has followed the movement of the century. "Man, oh, not men," cried Shelley, longing for an abstract idea large enough to gather without focusing all his nebulous emotion. To-day we reverse the cry; it is men, not man, that we want. Nobody, unless perhaps Mr. Frederic Harrison, can get up much glow over Humanity, but we all have an immense interest in people. Humor, says Emerson again, springs from comparing fractions with wholes. Revolutionary art busied itself with wholes. To clear away the rubbish of convention, and so to reach the essential, the typical, the normal, was its end and aim. Wordsworth is the central exponent of this aim. Everywhere he sought the complete. In maid or mere or mountain he beheld the limited but perfect expression of Divine Beauty. He is the father of modern realism, for to reach the simplicity of essential fact was his desire and his high achievement. He recalled poetry, which had strayed afar, to her true starting-point, and we have done little since but follow the path he pointed out. But it has led into a region strange to him. We have come to naturalism: to the art that does not select exceptional though normal instances of perfection, but reproduces all that it beholds, guided by one only passion, the passion for life. The infinite play and struggle by which, through the amorphous mass of existence, life all around us is

pressing forth into harmony, the effort as well as the thing done, fragments as well as wholes, — this is what the naturalist gives us; this is the world in which the humorist moves; this is the world of Robert Browning.

Browning can give us art as pure as that of Wordsworth. If from the poet of the revolution we have a Highland girl or a Lucy — exquisite figures, manifest by the still radiance of the light cast on them, — we have in the Victorian poet a Pompilia, shining with a white, heart-centred lustre, by which all those who move about her are revealed. But the distinctive method of Browning is not simple and direct: it is subtle, sophisticated, mocking. People find his writings obscure, doubtless for many reasons; one of the chief being the inability of the average mind to take a joke. Many a poem baffling to the serious reader bent on morals becomes daylight clear when read with a sense for the indirect. His people do not wear their heart on their sleeve. Whether of mediæval Italy or modern England, they live, literally and figuratively, indoors. Shelley's characters are creatures of wave and sky; Wordsworth's of green English fields; Browning's move in the house, the palace, and the street. Now humor belongs to the interior, to the haunts of men. It is a product of civilization. Where Wordsworth gives us a Michael, Browning gives a Sludge; where Wordsworth gives a Leech-Gatherer, Browning gives a Bishop; where Wordsworth gives us shepherds on the distant heights, dark against sunset gold,

Browning gives us, in the reeking court-room, the figures of "Publican black Ned Bratts, and Tabby his big wife too." The artificial, the abnormal, the absurd, but always first and foremost the individual, and hence the modern, — this is the world to which we have come. It would not be fair to say that it is the only world of fact, but at least it is the only world we know. Browning alone, among our Victorian poets, has entered it; for Browning alone, among them all, has yielded himself wholly to life.

The Development of Humor in Browning.

The humorist grows slowly. Through the long sequence of Browning's poems, we may trace — and the study is significant — the steady evolution of the humorous element. Idealist and Mephisto are contending for the mastery, and long does the issue seem doubtful.

First, in "Pauline," "Paracelsus," and "Sordello," we have a distinctly non-humorous period. Written under the dominant influence of Shelley, and imbued with the instinctive seriousness of youth, we could hardly expect these poems to be touched by the comic. In "Paracelsus" there is a hint of the future; for it is with a faintly satirical spirit unlike the pure subjectivity of Pauline, that Browning records for us the "Aspirations" — thin bubbles of aim filled with empty ambition — of the brilliant, arrogant, bombastic youth. But as a rule the art in these poems is grave, direct, and pure.

The next period is that of the great dramas, written between 1836–1846. And here the humorous factor suddenly appears, distinct and masterful. In these dramas, the man of the world boldly separates himself from the idealist, and steps, *in propria persona*, upon the stage. Meditative, a thought cynical, touched to a sense half grieved, half amused, of the paradoxes of life, he is the mouthpiece of the poets' satire, he is also the projection of half his personality, and gives us a new revelation of Robert Browning. He works untold mischief by being clearer-sighted than his fellow-men, and at least in one instance, — Browning's fine tragedy of the Moor serving Florence and betrayed by her, — has a vision dark with excess of light. Such a character is Braccio in "Luria," the Nuncio in "The Return of the Druses." Such are, in different ways, Bertrand and Melchior of "Colombe's Birthday." Such, supremely, is Ogniben in "A Soul's Tragedy," whose immense cleverness and terribly logical philosophy leave the whole situation in his hands.

Humor has in these dramas another manifestation. A serious art indeed prevails in them with one exception; but for dramatic irony of the highest sort they are surely unparalleled out of Shakespeare. In "Pippa Passes," such irony, delicate and pure, is found in the paradoxical contrast between the world as it exists and the world reflected in a girlish soul; in the later dramas it is bitter with a bitterness literally unto death. "Luria," "The Return of the Druses," "The Blot

on the 'Scutcheon," are ironical in their very warp and woof. In "The Return of the Druses," the ironic element conquers in every sense; in "The Blot" and "Luria," it is spiritually transcended, but determines the material catastrophe. "A Soul's Tragedy," study in triumphant satire, has some of Browning's keenest work. One and only one of these dramas, "Colombe's Birthday," a nymph among heroes and satyrs, has the mocking element subordinate, though present, and passes to an end both spiritually and materially triumphant.

We come now to the great central period, from "Men and Women" in 1855 to "The Ring and the Book" in 1870. This period, including as it does the principal short poems, is the most fecund in Browning's genius; the time when the superb vitality and glowing imaginative power of youth rush to meet and inform the virile philosophy and wide experience of maturer years. In these delightful poems, Browning's humor attains its widest range and highest buoyancy. It is not only subtly pervasive, as in the dramas; it controls whole poems, having matters quite its own way. And what scope and sweep it displays! The pure comic of "Up at a Villa — Down in the City," the fine grotesque of "Holy-Cross Day," the whimsicality of "Master Hughues of Saxe-Gotha," the satire of "Sludge" and "Blougram," the delicate mockery of "Confessions," the high spirits of "Fra Lippo Lippi," and the indescribable quality of that strange union of mysticism and irony, "The Flight of the Duchess" — all these are but

instances, chosen at random, of the splendid ease and force of handling, the lambent fire of spirit, in these brilliant poems. Rich in humor of situation as they are in dramatic suggestiveness, it is in that deepest humor which inheres in human character that they excel, and they thus belong to the highest region of humorous art.

But it is in "The Ring and the Book," *magnum opus* in every sense, that Browning's humorous power reaches its climax. Here humor of situation and of character combine; here, in the face of death and shame, idealist and man of the world hold one long terrible colloquy. The serious and the satirical element meet and balance in perfect equipoise. Each has apparently full freedom, neither is impeded nor overborne. The blending of elements in this superb poem Browning never equaled. His genius passed into another phase: a phase of pure satire.

At first, the idealist had conquered unmolested; later, he had been forced into a reluctant duet with Mephisto; but he had never yet been overborne.

Browning's last period of creative power extends from 1871 to 1889. "Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau," "Fifine at the Fair," "Red Cotton Nightcap Country," "Aristophanes' Apology," "The Inn Album," are the chief poems of this period. Often enough they have baffled the poet's readers. For here satire rules supreme, no longer alternating with serious art, and paradox is life itself. The poems are successive studies in spiritual failure.

"Fifine at the Fair" demonstrates the insincerity of affection, "Prince Hohenstiel" the insincerity of statesmanship, "Aristophanes" the insincerity of art. Compromise between religion and passion is the theme in "Red Cotton Nightcap Country," the gradual death of the spirit bound by the world or sin, in "The Inn Album." The method of mockery shapes the poems. Browning brings home to us, with cynical amusement, the ludicrous failure of our ideals, in the world of love, of action, or of art.

Thus humor, increasingly accentuated in Browning's work, becomes dominant at the end. From the grave Shelleyan idealism of "Pauline" we pass to the faint hint of satire in "Paracelsus," on to the strong use of dramatic irony in the dramas, and the vigorous development of ironical and grotesque art in the great monologues. In "The Ring and the Book," the watershed of Browning's genius, the springs of humor and of pathos meet. Finally, in the masterly poems of the last period, Browning the Satirist stands undisguised before us. His closing work, a series of short poems, strikes once more a serious note. Leaving them out of account for the moment, we find, from "Pauline" to "Aristophanes' Apology," a steady development of ironic art. From the latent mockery of "Paracelsus" to the final translation of the entire human drama into satire, the voice of the man of the world grows constantly in volume and penetration. Mephisto or idealist — which prevails? We cannot yet answer the question. But

we may at least, in view of the ceaseless vigor of their conflict, assert with confidence that Robert Browning is a great humorist.

Grotesque Art in Browning.

Now let us be more specific. Let us try to find where Browning's special province lies within this great kingdom of humorous art. In the pure comic he does not excel. The joyous, intellectualized animalism of Falstaff is out of his ken. So are the pure high spirits, the farcical delight in whimsicality, of Dickens or Dekker. So is the delicate and witty grace of an evanescent society, so delightfully caught, in all its diaphanous charm, by the art of Dobson. Browning is seldom light-hearted. When he so pleases, indeed, he can give us excellent fooling. The Pied Piper has a right to entice into the Weser with his bagpipes any one who would insinuate that his creator cannot tell a story for pure delight. It would be hard to find anything funnier in its way than the soliloquy of the Italian nobleman, pining for the joys of the town, of "Up at a Villa — Down in the City." If there is satire in this delightful reversal of sentimental standards, pure amusement is its result. Still on the whole, the saying is true; Browning's muse is buoyant, but she is not joyous. Nor is the reason far to seek. The comic is the region of pure forms, while the tragic is the region of ungarnished fact. Our delight in escaping to the society of a Falstaff or a Micawber comes from the relief which these immoral creatures afford to our jaded sense of

right. We cannot expect simple comedy from Browning; for he never releases us, perhaps no Victorian poet ever could release us, from the grip of fact. The ethical is with him ingrain. His peculiar humor has a special source: the suggestion of a double point of view, that of form and fact together, and the sense of the incongruity between them. His wide cleverness sees instantly the world of forms, his imagination as swiftly peers into the depths of fact. He will show us both at once, and the result fairly stings us with its cleverness. Take, for instance, the little poem called "A Likeness." The humor, missed by many people, all comes from the contrast between the outer indifference and the real passion, the ludicrous colloquialism of the conventional slangy young man and his immensely romantic sentiment. Now from this contrast between form and substance spring two great branches of humorous art — the Grotesque and the Satiric. It is in these branches that Browning is master. His place is with Cervantes rather than with Dickens, with Swift rather than with Mark Twain.

The reasons which draw Browning towards grotesque art have been already hinted. The democratic realism of the century, proclaiming the sacredness, not only of the simple, but of the ugly, and forcing us to penetrate all alien experience; romanticism, force vague but vital, which ever seeks the individual, dwells on the startling, craves the abnormal and the incomplete; the scientific spirit, with its vast curiosity; — all these causes,

blending into one, as indeed it is impossible to separate them, are responsible for Browning's instinctive attraction towards grotesque art. How strange are his studies of anomalies! The man-beast, Caliban; the blear-eyed grammarian, who has never lived, carried with rhythmic tread to his high grave; Ned Bratts and his wife, uncouth, sweating, devout creatures, touched by the grace of God; Porphyria's lover, and Johannes Agricola; the greasy Jews of Holy-Cross Day, with the fierce incongruity between their outward guise and inner passion; the monks of the Spanish cloister; — all crowd in on us, vindicating Browning's weird claim to be Master of the Revels of the fantastic, the grotesque, and the insane. Not since the superb and sombre studies in lunacy of the old English dramatists, with their masques and dances of madmen and their intensification of disease and crime, has imagination of this order been known. Pathological studies if you will, these poems yet vindicate their right to exist by the fact that they do exist; that they force swift, fiery passage to our consciousness of Fact. Not only this: though deformed they are never monstrous. Browning portrays no Frankensteins, hideous births of the darkness, whom if we could we would ignore, creatures of no claim to intrude among men and women. It is essential humanity which he, no less than Wordsworth, seeks to give us. Wider in range than the earlier poet, his interest centres in the variations on the central theme played by the queer freaks of Nature, but

the theme is always there. Browning never sinks into the vulgar art that exults in sheer deformity, the art of a Zola or a Tourneur.

The height and the abyss, grotesque and glorious, lie very near together in his work. Hence the abrupt swiftness of his transitions. Other poets keep their soul's agony and their sense of the ridiculous somewhat apart. "Manfred" is hardly ludicrous to his creator. But in Browning, hero turns clown, clown hero, with no word of warning. Idealist does not even step behind the scene to change his costume. A wink, and the man of the world is before us. These changes of attitude are never so startling as in the religious poems. In "Christmas Eve," for instance, the coughs and whines and warts, the dripping garments and pudgy umbrellas of the congregation, and the exasperated contempt of the visitor, give place instantly to the majestic vision of the Christ arisen, and the mood of contrite adoration. A new departure in poetry, indeed! What shall we say for it, except that, whether it be art or no, it is singularly like life?

And what more can we say, or what different, of Browning's amazing style — that style which at one moment reaches the purity of lyric rapture or the earnest force of meditation, and again breaks into a jog-trot worse than a Sapolio advertisement! One thing we can say, one only: that the style always matches the theme, with perfect subtlety and fluid ease. For a brutal subject, brutal rhythm, brutal rhyme! Browning's large and

easy extension of poetic art, his frequent incursions into the method of prose, are only a return to the vigorous almost insolent freedom with which the old dramatists handle their mother-tongue. To many of us, this style, with its unspeakably ridiculous rhymes, its unlimited variety of measures, its daring colloquialisms, and its easy power of rising into austere strength or limpid beauty, seems almost an ideal instrument for rendering the pathetic absurdity of our human life, where the divine is revealed, if revealed at all, through the angular, the vulgar, and the confused. In a world where the ridiculous is organically one with the holy, the style may well be the vesture of the thought. Many people, to be sure, prefer the grotesque rendered in Miltonic blank verse; and there is plenty of poetry written for them.

Striking though the grotesque element in Browning may be, it lies less deep than his satire. Irony radical and bitter is, as we have seen, latent in his work from the days of "Paracelsus" and becomes dominant ere the close. Never has there been manifest a more fiendlike subtlety in all-pervasive skepticism than Browning, when he likes, can show us. Mephisto has grown wise with age; he no longer denies sacred things nor pure emotions. Goethe's coarser Mephisto may do so, but the delicate fiend of Browning patronizes the spiritual sphere. No ignoring of the soul, my friend. We do not despise a worn Elvire: we recognize her charm in her pale gravity of

Ironic Art in Browning.

sorrow, but this charm we cherish, that we may return with more entire zest to the bronzed limbs, the impudent pose, the heyday of the senses, in "that fizgig named Fifine." Let us cherish the soul; for without its haunting rebuke, its fine, faint ministries, the luxury of flesh were incomplete!

Such an attitude is obviously remote from a simple and innocent civilization. In primitive times the good is beautiful, the noble is true. Wordsworth and Shelley, poets of tender instinct for the Fair and Right, give us a world where there is almost a sacramental unity between the outward and visible sign and the inward and spiritual grace. With Browning we enter a different region — the region of Bishop Blougram, "who said true things and called them by wrong names." Soul and body have gotten awry, semblance contradicts reality, the good is a factor in the bad. In this sophisticated and contradictory world, where "we called the chessboard black, we call it white," a Pompilia saves her soul alive by eloping with a priest, while a Florentine lady dooms hers to lingering death by loyalty to her husband. Here the devil tempts Jules to reject impurity, and Luigi to refrain from murder. Browning is the poet of paradox. It could not be otherwise were he to be the poet of his age.

Nowhere is Browning's satire keener or more subtly pervasive than in his great central poem, "The Ring and the Book." Ironic in its very framework is this story of the child of the woman

of the street — Pompilia, saint and martyr. Magnificently sarcastic is the handling of the manifold opinions of the world, the perverted consciousness of the husband. The ironic intention is missed by many readers. It is a temptation in the vast labyrinth of the poem to choose for enjoyment the high, pure, poetic monologues of Pompilia, Caponsacchi, the Pope, and Guido, and to dismiss the rest as tedious and obscure. The obvious interest indeed centres in the woful story; we mourn for Pompilia as for Desdemona, we thrill to Caponsacchi as to Romeo. This is right and well, yet it fulfills but half of the great intention of Browning. Guido has murdered Pompilia: shall he live or die? Here is the theme; but our interest grows slighter in the central story than in its effect on the minds of men. Speaker after speaker gives us his interpretation, his effort to reach eternal verity; speaker after speaker shows us his own natural prejudice predetermining his thought. As we proceed, the satire becomes fierce, scathing, overwhelming, till to find Truth seems impossible, not because of objective paradox, but because of subjective prepossession. Surely psychological analysis never went so far, the personal equation was never so vividly presented in its practical workings. Half Rome condemns Pompilia; has he not reason? Does he not know himself what it is to have a fair young wife to guard? The other half condemns. How pitiful her wounds! Such suffering argues innocence indeed — to the sentimental heart. With the monologues of the Law-

yers, the irony deepens. The man whose flowery rhetoric defends her, never, in his cynical mind, questions her guilt nor shrinks from it. After her death, employed to blacken her memory, he cheerfully formulates invective where he had lavished tears. On the other side, Don Hyacinthus, domestic, fat, and gay, seeks to fasten on Pompilia the stigma of horrible sin; he bends himself to the task, a whistle on his lips, the love of good Latin in his mind, and in his heart a thought of the little son whose birthday treat he is preparing. By stroke after stroke, Browning deepens the satiric impression. The nuns in the convent have knelt in reverence around the couch where Pompilia breathes forth her white soul; nay, hints of miraculous healing — are they not murmured? Look on a few months. What is this? The convent gone to law to prove her guilty! For by a legal quibble, if her child was born out of wedlock, her inheritance is theirs. Again, we have been admitted to the presence of Guido in the prison. We have heard his snarling blasphemies, and have listened, our hearts still with horror, to his last ravings of bestial fear: —

> "Cardinal, take away your crucifix,
> Abate, leave my lips alone, they bite. . . .
> *I thought you would not slay impenitence.*" [1]

Abate and Cardinal, pallid and sombre, have stood beside us in this prison-hell. What say the two grave Churchmen of the hideous interview? We hear their version later.

[1] *The Ring and the Book; Guido*, 2229, 2230, and 2239.

> "They both report, their efforts to dispose
> The unhappy nobleman for ending well,
> Despite the natural sense of injury
> Were crowned at last with a complete success."

We have also a spectator's glimpse of the dying man, into whose abject soul we have peered with disgust and horror: —

> "His intrepidity, nay, nonchalance,
> As up he stood and down he sat himself,
> Struck admiration into all who saw. . . .
> And, with the name of Jesus on his lips,
> Received the fatal blow." [2]

Saint and unflinching hero! Hail and farewell to thee, Guido, as thou leavest this queer world of Shows for the unknown world of Fact!

Thus is given us the sorrowful Story, flashed back from mind after mind, each time with a different lustre. The end of it all seems summed up by the obscure Augustinian monk who had listened to the dying words of Pompilia, as he cries: —

> "Who trusts
> To human testimony for a fact
> Gets this sole fact — himself is proved a fool."

The Augustinian himself, nay the very Pope — we are not allowed to pause without the insinuation of their meanness of motive: they too can be interpreted as judging, not according to eternal laws, but to personal and petty instincts.

Vanity and delusion! Such seems our human life. And the pitiful failure to judge truly, this universal distrust, this absence of absolute stand-

[1] *The Ring and the Book*, 125–128. [2] *Ibid.* 135–137, 188, 189.
[3] *Ibid.* 599–601.

ards, — is it then humorous? Yes, verily, to the mind, but the laughter of thought turns to the tears of love. The old lawyer, chuckling innocently as he destroys Pompilia's fame, is comic to the mind; but to the heart he is tragic, for the heart knows no laughter, and the incongruities of life torture rather than tickle it. It has been pointed out that the Œdipus tale would make a capital farce; and the woful story of Pompilia, reflected in the minds of man, wears masks of varying mockery, which suggests that human life is all one evil joke.

Mockery of Truth.

What does it all mean? From this play of conflicting shadows, from this kaleidoscopic world where the saint is the whore and the hero is the dastard and the seer is the imbecile, what is the final impression? Browning himself gives it to us: —

> "Words are vain —
> Our human testimony words and wind."

The unreality of life is heavy upon him. The grand monologue of the Pope has this for direct theme, and would be sufficient, even were there no other hint, to show the central purpose of "The Ring and the Book." Satiric in its essence, Browning's spirit, through the lips of a Braccio, a Tresham, a Jules, a Blougram, sends ringing down the century the old question, "What is Truth?" Not Swift, not Rabelais, has felt this question more passionately or cut more ruthlessly into the fair shows of life, to reveal the dust at

its heart. What is Truth? A St. John may give his answer, a Caliban his as well. The question haunts the highest and most serious poems, as well as those directly humorous.

Browning is philosophical; he is also, and first and foremost, personal. His virile humanity turns by preference to life in the concrete. If Truth indeed elude us, how of Truthfulness? Sincerity! Where shall we find it? In this world of fleeting impulses and veiled impressions, how can a man be sure that he is true, even to the truth he sees? Caliban may be honest through and through in his mistaking for God Setebos, his own monstrous shadow: what shall we say of the reflective vein of a Don Juan, where willful and instinctive casuistry blend; of a Napoleon, enwoven in tissue after tissue of half-unconscious lies? Creatures of the false so utterly that they are never sure they are not speaking the truth, we, too, as we listen to their specious frank utterances, lose ourselves in the dim borderland of fact and fancy, right and wrong. Thus by easy gradation we advance into the region of Browning's greatest power, the region of Delusion. Studies in Delusion! How many he has given us, how marvelously varied! How the conscious cheat melts into the instinctive self-deceiver, how that which seems deception torments us with the question whether it be not true! Sludge is intensely superstitious, cheat though he be. Blougram is not at all sure that miracles do not happen after all. Poor Léonce Miranda, with all his practical infidelity, is sure

enough that they do to make the supreme test of faith and fling himself from the tower of Clairvaux, resting on the mercy of Our Lady. And how intensely men can be deceived in themselves! Witness Chiappino, hero and martyr to his own consciousness; nay, here 's the subtlety of the thing, actually such, for one brief moment. Behold the high-souled patriot, by process of indisputable logic, false friend, the prefect of the town, the four and twentieth renegade leader of revolt. Not only the ignoble but the noble souls are tainted to their own torment. A Djabal feels for his Druse nation a deep and genuine love. Is it not for their good that he plays Hakeem? Nay, so murmurs a question in his quivering Oriental soul, may he not be Hakeem, after all? From such delusions, which we may still count as normal, Browning advances swiftly and without break to the abnormal type. The moral and intellectual delusions, conscious and unconscious, melt into the vagaries of insanity — those vagaries which Browning has depicted with greater force and insight than any poet since Webster. He places us at the frenzied heart of those who burn the heretic, thinking that they do God service, of a Johannes Agricola or a Porphyria's lover; and as we shudder there we realize that such distorted sincerity in all its horror differs only in degree from the fluctuating and creeping falsity which veins not only the surface but the depth of human life.

The world cannot find Truth, though with many voices it proclaim her; the soul cannot find her,

though it seek with tears. Sincerity in a world of delusion is the central delusion of all. Such seems to be the impression left by Browning's unflinching poetry. The idealist, indeed, in the presence of fact, has small option save to turn to satire, especially when the man of the world is ever at his ear with sharp, triumphant whisper. The satire shall be light when we can so keep it, fierce when it eludes restraint, but always ruthless. Chief satisfaction left to the poor idealist is the sense of power in penetrating shams. No one has known the joy of this intellectual exercise more thoroughly than Browning, for no idealist has ever understood worldliness so completely. The warmth and glimmer of sunrise is in Shelley and Keats; Browning leads us into atmosphere dry and cold, gray Autumn weather keen with wind. "Luce intellettual, piena d' amore," Dante found in Heaven; with Browning the light is intellectual enough, but the love is often conspicuous by its absence. Nowhere, not in Rabelais' "Voyage de la Dive Bouteille," has the play of a mightier intellect exposed the follies and cheapness of life. In one vigorous poem, Browning sums up for us his satirical philosophy. "Fifine at the Fair," humorous in the very beat of its swinging measure as in its central situation, is a study in the relative versus the absolute, sense versus soul, false versus truth. "By practice with the false I reach the true" is its theme. Figure after figure through the splendid poem gives the same conviction: the necessity of Falsehood, life a sequence of shifting shows.

"We bid a frank farewell to what — we think — should be,
And, with as good a grace, welcome what is — we find." [1]

"Stage-play, the honest cheating," which has abandoned all pretense of deceiving, is the most genuine thing in the world. Man is a swimmer. Only by sustaining his body in the sea of False can he keep breath and vision in the air of Truth. Does he try to escape the sea, to rise free from "this wash of the world, wherein, life-long, we drift?" behold him utterly submerged. Man is a lover, but he must love the mountebank would he apprehend the saint. Human life is one great Carnival, where in mocking masquerade throngs move and waver, disguised by uncertain grimaces. Finally, in one colossal vision the poet sees the unstable falsity of all human achievement. Temples and Universities rise grandly serene around him. "When lo! A Something ails the edifice, it bends, it bows, it buries," the architecture has melted into forms utterly new, that vanish in their turn. Religion, Philosophy, History, Morality, Art, "above vicissitude, we used to hope," alike "evanish into dust." Mocking Change is the law of earth, and Truth's work forever decays.

The sense that Truth lies beyond our ken thus haunts the poetry of Browning; there is another sense, as haunting in its sorrow. The failure to find Truth is grievous; more grievous, to the poet of passion, is the failure to find Love. To Browning, as to Dante, "love is the

Mockery of Love.

[1] Stanza cix.

only good in the world;" but to this poet of an elaborated society, genuine love evades search and eludes vision. For love cannot house with convention, and conventions seem to govern the world. In a series of light, Heine-like little poems where the sob is disguised by the shrug and life's tragedy shows through its triviality, Browning, with sad mockery, celebrates Love's Failures. The world, cold, fair, and courteous, gains the ear of weakling lovers, and three souls are lost. Seeming duty steps between, and falsely sensitive spirits lose life's only good. Languid creatures through mere inertia let love escape them, and sink into spiritual death, unshriven by the high absolution of passion. A comical and conventional imitation of true sentiment freezes the spirit of the winsome Duchess, who flies from intricate pretenses to the wild freedom of a gypsy life. Fickleness, so proclaim an Elvire, a James Lee's Wife, nay, Any Wife to Any Husband, — fickleness is the law of man if not of woman.

And when a miracle happens, and real love is born into the world, an unbelieving generation denies it. The utterly noble devotion of a Luria stimulates his watchful spies to ever-fresh ingenuity in devising theories of his guilt. His intense and simple feeling for Florence is but disguised ambition in the eyes of Braccio, the subtly cultured man. We can hardly question the design with which Browning gives us, as his one example of the pure dignity of perfect heroism, no child of the civilized world, but a Moor, the Son of the Desert.

A diseased instinct of suspicion, a morbidly critical temper, is the note of sophisticated society. Braccio and Luria point the contrast. The tragedy and at the same time the deep humor of the drama are found in the blunders of the worldly temper, confusing all best things to ill, and ferreting out with immense cleverness far-fetched and unpleasant explanations of the simplest acts of right, true-hearted loyalty. Luria conquers, but he dies.

Distrust of love is the note of death. Studies of hate Browning with strong power has given us. Sometimes they are delicately etched with a light, fine point, as in "Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis," sometimes bitten with incisive sharpness, as in the "Soliloquy in the Spanish Cloister;" sometimes they attain a Rembrandtesque intensity, as in the sombre picture of Guido. But hate, however horrible, is not the worst of life. Far worse are languor, inertia, the contempt of the world; and on these he lavishes his bitterest irony, his clearest scorn. "Love is the only good in the world," but through a barren, wide, and dusty region must man travel in search of her — a region where the dust raised by his footsteps hides too often the rainbow glimmer of her wings. Surely it seems at times that the soul must flee with the blithesome Duchess from this world of shams and shows, and turn to the free mystery of Nature, would it enter the reality of passion. The world the foe to love! The theme is not new, but it has been treated by Browning with new poignancy, because with direct and ironical conviction.

Distrust of Truth! Distrust of Love! These are the notes of pessimist or cynic. Men have laughed at life often enough because their souls were bitter, and the world's jesters are notoriously sorrowful. How can it be otherwise? For the humorist dwells forever on the discrepancies and incongruities of life. These things are ludicrous to the intellect, we have seen that they are tragic to the heart. The mere *farceur*, indeed, may laugh at ease, light-hearted in a world of pure forms, but with the mere *farceur* we know that Browning has little in common. It is Cervantes, Swift, and Rabelais with whom we placed him, and these great sorrowful souls see life's tragedy too deeply to speak it. In each of them, the man of the world is final victor, and the idealist can only assert himself by sighs. Cervantes' perfect knight travels through life fighting windmills; the wise statesmanship of Swift is travestied by savage proposals; Rabelais' noble Abbey of the Ideal Life is to be built by an unutterable rogue. The despair of Swift is fierce, that of Cervantes gently absolute; and if Rabelais seems by temperament and nationality to escape the infection of sorrow, it is through recklessness and flippancy that he is freed. It is he who tells us how when all countries and all philosophies have been explored by the wild seekers for Truth, they come at last to the Supreme Oracle, the Divine Bottle; and the final word of the Bottle, the central word of the Rabelaisian philosophy, is "Trincq."

Comparisons: Clough, Byron, Swift, Cervantes, Rabelais.

In the roll-call of our modern poets, we found two besides Browning who can answer to the name of humorist: Byron and Arthur Hugh Clough. Both are humorists because they despair. "Don Juan" and "Dipsychus" alike owe the cleverness of their persiflage to the bitter perplexity of their spirit. A couple of lines from a brother poet, equally sad but less dowered with the spirit of mockery, describes them.

> "Where faiths are built on dust,
> Where love is half mistrust,"

cries Arnold,[1] describing human society. As we read Byron and Clough, those strangely alien spirits, akin only in their sorrow and their jest, we seem to lose our hold and drift into space. In Byron we are in the region where love is half mistrust; with Clough we enter that more sorrowful country where faith is built on dust, and find it in truth "hungry and barren and sharp as the sea." The great fear which among all his melodramatic sorrows wrung the heart of Byron with a genuine pain was distrust of love. This distrust sobs through all his stormy work — distrust born indeed of personal fault and folly, but none the less bitter for that. It turned him cynic at last, as he lost all sense of the purity and worth of passion, and the vicious brilliancy of a "Don Juan" signals his spiritual end. If distrust of love turns Byron cynic, it is distrust of truth that turns Clough pessimist. Unlike Byron, his passion is of head, not heart. His days are over-

[1] *Stagirius.*

shadowed and oppressed by the remoteness of truth from the soul of man. His high spirit is nobly constant to what may, perhaps, be more than a dream; but he lives as the heroes of Webster die, "in a mist." Behind his delicate mockery, his pungent epigrams, lies the sad conviction that the conventions of society are shams, and its religious faith delusion.

The great humorists of the world have been its pessimists and unbelievers. Browning, as we have seen, is allied to them in quality of insight, in force of realistic genius. Is he of their brotherhood? Is his message theirs?

He can be as hopeless as Clough, as bitter as Byron. The boyish animalism of the earlier Don Juan is almost innocent beside the specious, intellectualized sensuality of the Don Juan of Fifine. No religious sophistry nor theological hopelessness was beyond the ken of the creator of Blougram. Byron's bluster and Clough's low sighs are forgotten, as we listen to the subtle intensity with which the author of "The Inn Album" exposes earth's blunders and delusions, its follies and its pitiful sins. All that goes to make up cynicism of the intellect and despair of the heart is palpably present to his imagination. The whole of Byron and of Clough might be comprehended within his vast product, and the world would miss no element contributed to human thought. Browning is greater in mocking insight than any poet of the century; nay, no one of the great humorists of the past has ever carried ironic art to a higher point of perfection.

Browning is sad at heart, then? Belief in life's essential good is lost to him, as to other satirists? Like other realists, he finds that all ideal is mirage?

"Subtlest assertor of the soul in song," he is our most robust of optimists. In an age sorrowful-hearted and timid, his verse rings forth to us with a clarion note of cheer. In a time given to gray agnosticism, he smites into our eyes the light of faith. Among all the century's children, he is the great proclaimer of belief and joy: —

> "I find Earth not gray, but rosy,
> Life not dull, but fair of hue.
> Do I stoop? I pluck a posy.
> Do I stop and stare? All 's blue." [1]

"Truth 's golden o'er us, though we refuse it," proclaims, at the end of a whimsical poem, the man who announced with a shrug, "We called the chessboard black, we call it white." He who mourned love killed by convention, rises in high lyric rapture to the faith in love eternal, spite of shows and strife: —

> "No! love which on earth, amid all the shows of it,
> Has ever been known the sole good of life in it;
> That love, ever growing there, spite of the strife in it
> Shall arise, made perfect, from Death's repose of it." [2]

There is one word in which we instinctively sum up the life-worth of Robert Browning: —

> "He at least believed in Soul, he was very sure of God." [3]

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[1] *At the Mermaid.* [2] *Christmas Eve.*
[3] *La Saisiaz.*

Our greatest modern humorist — the man who sees most clearly the incongruities of life — is our greatest optimist as well. Not Tennyson nor Hugo holds with so superb, masculine, unflinching faith to the essential sacredness of life. All that makes for cynicism, all that makes for despair, is comprehended in his vision; but "God is it that transcends." He might say with Whitman: —

Idealist and Mephisto.

"Roaming in thought over the Universe, I saw the little that is Good steadily hastening towards immortality.
And the vast all that is called evil I saw hastening to merge itself and become lost and dead." [1]

Browning has achieved the final, the most difficult of all reconciliations: life to him is absurd, but it is sacred too.

Yes! Mephisto and the idealist are bound together in this great and varied soul, and the "perception of disparity," of the "detected skulking institutions," does indeed make the eyes run over with laughter. Yet Mephisto does not prevail, and the last word remains for once with the idealist. Love is divine and shall endure. Truth is, and the men of the future shall behold her. Luria's dying call shows the soul victorious over diplomacy and doubt: —

"If we could wait! The only fault 's with Time:
All men become good creatures — but so slow."

We have seen that the very theme of "The Ring and the Book" is the futility of human judgment; yet can any one lay down the epic doubting that,

[1] *After Reading Hegel.*

the alloy of imagination dispelled, the ring of pure golden truth lies in his hand? Confused are earth's voices, false its surmises; yet a Pompilia stoops over us perfect in whiteness, a Caponsacchi goes forth to "work, be unhappy, but bear life," and even a Guido in a last wild appeal recognizes holiness as redemptive. Finally, a Pope "sees as God sees." And this, which is the function of the highest characters, is in Browning's mind the function of the poet himself. "All is change," murmurs the earth-voice of Fifine; — but "All is permanence," rejoins a sky-whisper at the end. In this conflict of shadows to look upward towards substantial Light, through life's worst paradoxes to discern the unity of Truth, — this is the task he sets himself; rather this is the result which with his heaven-born instinct he attains. Of meditative and sorrowful laughter we find our fill in Browning; but the laughter is never fiend-laughter, for it is never directed at the noble or the pure.

And not only does the idealist win the final triumph: we cannot help wondering whether Mephisto may not be his friend all along. The two are not foes, preserving an armed neutrality; they are brothers in spirit, as even Clough discovered. For it is this world of paradox, where truth is veiled and love eludes, which affords, to Browning's thought, the necessary test of passion and discipline of belief. The very scoff, if we analyze it, turns to prayer and makes for faith. Browning's most grotesque studies, in all their wild

power, are to the end of a spiritual revelation. Through these thick exhalations of earthiness, a celestial light, struggling to shine, reveals the very forms that would obscure its radiance. See Ned Bratts and Tabby, lumpish, physical, horrible creatures! Convinced of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come, trembling with awe, contrition, and spiritual agony, they witness better than the fairest saint to the supreme reality of soul. Devotion to truth is better manifest through the study of Greek particles by a Grammarian than through the study of the starry heavens by a Galileo. To create a new astronomy, the world may well be lost; but lose it to "settle 'Hoti's' business," would you vindicate idealism forever.

The seeming triumph of Mephisto attains its climax in the outwardly unbroken cynicism of the last great poems. Miranda's compromise between the Blessed Mary and his mistress Clara, the subtle buffoonery of Aristophanes, the casuistry of Don Juan, weary us with unflinching sarcasm. Yet these very poems spring from a superb assurance. No one who did not believe robustly in the good of life would dare to write them. Browning's message had been delivered long ago: the message of "Saul," of "Easter Day," of "A Death in the Desert." He had proclaimed his vision of the Absolute; he was free to turn to deviations from true sight, to study the faint and broken gleams of truth that shine through falsity and wrong. "Apologies" is the author's chosen name for these studies in spiritual failure. Only a man who be-

lieved in the eternal principles of solid morality could give us a Miranda, and show us in the flickering of his misguided devotion a spark of the true fire. A Hohenstiel and a Blougram confess that the world is not theirs. The whole tone of their utterances is a defiant excuse for intrusion in a world which after all belongs not to the diplomat or to the doubter, but to the man of action and of faith. It is because truth for Browning is no fragile, subjective product, but an eternal reality, that he can describe for us with ruthless candor the blunders of human thought. We are glad indeed to hear in "Asolando" the direct and ringing words of a faith that faced old age undaunted; yet even without their witness we should have known full well that Browning was still optimist and believer, and that the poet of "Fifine" was also the poet of "Saul."

Matthew Arnold tells us that Wordsworth's power was to "put by" "the cloud of mortal destiny." There are moods when we are grateful to have the cloud put by. There are others, and not our lowest, when we seek one who can teach us to live in the cloud.

The poets of the revolution give us a purist art, and such art can never completely satisfy. High and permanent, it speaks the truth, but not the full truth; and our ears hearken for another voice. But the voice we seek is not that of the cynic, and the man who pauses in life's paradoxes will not utter life's final word. Thought will never be satisfied by the type of religion which with-

draws from the knowledge of fact, nor by the type of worldliness which denies the existence of truth.

Browning is both jester and prophet. In him alone, among the Victorians, art frees itself entirely from the control of past ideals and the fear of the present, and yields itself audaciously to the actual. His broad recognition of modern fact is fused with intense sympathy for ideal vision. In him, the century has achieved a new synthesis, and a great humorist is for once a great believer.

# VI

## THE POETRY OF SEARCH

### 1. *Victorian Poetry*

SHELLEY, in the second act of the "Prometheus Unbound," tells us a lovely story of Asia, his ideal Lady, awakened by the voices of nature, summoned by dreams of redemption and progress to a pilgrimage over the wide earth. Many interpretations have been put upon this delicate myth. Perhaps none truer could be found than that which should see in Asia the holy Spirit of Imagination, and in her mystical wandering the Progress of Poetry through the modern world. Poetry, like Asia, had long been lingering dreamwise, far from the heart of man. Suddenly, a hundred years ago, she beheld in the eyes of Faith the image of a free humanity; then the vision of progress, swift and terrible, passed before her sight: —

> "Its rude hair
> Roughens the wind that lifts it: its regard
> Is wild and quick." [1]

As in the myth, so in historic fact, nature, long inert, became to the imagination vocal with spirit-voices. Thus aroused by the love of nature and

[1] *Prometheus Unbound*, Act II. Scene 1.

inspired by the love of man, poetry entered on her great journey across the wastes of the modern world. Keats, Wordsworth and Shelley roamed past lakes and heights and forests faun-haunted, and the first stages of the journey were gloriously fair. But within our memories, the imagination has descended to new regions.

> "Through the veil and bar
> Of things that seem and are," [1]

mighty spiritual forces have swept her downward, to that underworld where Demogorgon, the Power of Reason, holds dark and secret state. Before this gloom-clad Spirit, the Spirit of light and love stands and questions. Much she has to ask: the origin of evil, the being of God, the hope of salvation. Asia questioning Demogorgon, the Imagination seeking from Reason an answer to the central mysteries — here is the image of poetry in the Victorian age.

During fifty years, poetry has sojourned in a region of shadows, meeting the problems of the spirit. In agony and in perplexity it has met them. The joyous and emotional enthusiasm with which the conception of a redeemed humanity first filled the souls of the poets, has passed away; it has been succeeded by an intellectual phase of doubt and fear. Face to face the Imagination has seen the Power of Destruction radiating darkness, a power in which the heart of faith feels but dimly a living soul.

[1] *Prometheus Unbound*, Act II. Scene 3.

Victorian poetry sprang into existence in the decade between 1830 and 1840. Since the death of Keats in 1821, of Shelley in 1822, of Byron in 1824, English song had been stilled. In Wordsworth and Coleridge, the poet though not the man had died. With Rogers and Moore, the writers of the hour, poetry had sunk into a gentle and trivial union of similes and sentiments, adapted to the drawing-room and the harp. A "fragment" called "Pauline," issued in 1833, and two collections of short swallow-flights of song, issued in 1830 and 1833, are known to us now as the prelude to a great music. The Conditions.

The decade in which young Tennyson and Browning began to write was one of immense significance. At its beginning, England seemed given over to convention; before its end, had appeared every tendency, except the new science, which was to shape the world we know.

Macaulay, Brougham, Sydney Smith, men of the present, seem to fill the intellectual horizon. They recall those most respectable and complacent phenomena: Parliament, the Established Church, and the "Edinburgh Review." Before the decade is over, Thackeray and Dickens are to begin their work, flashing upon English society a searchlight keen enough to destroy complacency forever. From the solitude of Scottish moors, a book is unobtrusively sent forth called "Sartor Resartus," and the religious and social movements of the Victorian age have found their prophet. Nor is it in prophecy alone that these movements are

visible. The shapeless, pathetic agitation of Chartism shows for the first time the Samson workingman as distinct from the Bourgeois, "feeling for his grip on the pillars," and hints at organized industrial uprising, and the struggle for social democracy. The social renaissance is thus ominously visible in retrospect; before the decade was over the religious renaissance, in varying phases, absorbed the conscious experience of the day. As the revival of the Catholic ideal, it is manifest in Newman and the Oxford movement. As a denial, perhaps equally religious in spirit, of all Catholic tradition, and a launching out into unexplored seas of thought, it finds its earliest and far from least effective exponent in the young John Stuart Mill. As an impulse at once Christian and critical, seeking the synthesis of faith and freedom, it is foreshadowed if not fully manifest in the early utterances of Frederick Denison Maurice, in the work of Arnold of Rugby, and in the wavering yet still lambent light which, until 1834, was diffused from the home of Coleridge.

Never were ten years more full of vigorous promise. In 1830 barriers were up on every side. The limits of passion were set by themes suitable to Lady Holland's dinner-table; the limits of politics by discussion acceptable to the House of Commons; the limits of speculation by questions sure not to molest the thirty-nine articles. In 1840, all inward barriers were down. The spiritual life of England had been quickened from the pulpit of St. Mary's; a clear though half-articu-

late prophecy of the uprising of the People had been given in Chartism; the movement towards scientific and positive thought had been inaugurated by John Stuart Mill; and modern literature, both prose and poetry, had suddenly arisen from a seemingly arid soil. It was the birth-decade of life as we know it, the seed-time of the modern world.

The Men.

Tennyson and Browning, chief among the Victorian poets, appear then in this great decade. Their work, wide in scope and massive in volume, continues to the end of the creative Victorian epoch. It was in 1889 that the aspiration of Browning in "Prospice" was granted, while Tennyson, in 1893, passed "to where beyond these voices there is peace." In time of production, as in scope of achievement, their writing includes all the work of the minor Victorian poets. During their activity, two secondary schools have risen and decayed, and no thought-attitude characteristic of a lesser poet fails to find some expression in the elastic work of the greater men.

The first secondary school of Victorian poetry is that of the poets of doubt. It has for distinctive names Matthew Arnold and Arthur Hugh Clough. Clough was born in 1819; Arnold in 1821, the death-year of Shelley. Their poetic activity, not opening till 1848, is concluded in the early sixties, while Tennyson and Browning are yet in their first prime.

The other group, more than ten years younger,

is that of the poets of art. Its chief names are Rossetti, Morris, and Swinburne. Rossetti, though born in 1828, did not publish till 1870; the work of Swinburne and Morris is subsequent to 1858. The poetic activity of the school thus coincides with the later and riper work of the leaders; and it may truly be said to be held within their achievement. Rossetti alone, it is true, passed before them into silence; but Morris the poet died long ago, to give place to the prose-writer and social reformer, while Swinburne for some time has given us echoes only, hollow though sweet, of his earlier song. Forty years, then, covered the appearance and decadence of these two minor schools of verse, while the large and placid work of Tennyson and Browning took all but sixty years for rise, development, and fall.

The Quest.

A brooding over the mysteries of the spirit is the central temper of all these diverse schools; a question whether the spirit be, is the shadow that rests upon them. The verse of a whole period has never been at once so abstruse yet so passionate. The scientific spirit, leading men to new keenness in analysis and new emphasis on process, has shaped this poetry, the roaming instinct that explores distant regions and foreign ideals has guided it; but the impulse which dominates it has been, through all the Victorian age, the search for truth.

Or, since poetry abhors an abstraction more than nature a vacuum, may we not change the phrase?

Shall we be far wrong in saying that the desire which controls the Victorian poets of England is the desire for God? The search after God informs and creates the work of Arnold and Clough; it is the central motif of "The Ring and the Book" as truly as of "In Memoriam." The democratic ideal controls the poets of the revolution, the religious ideal controls the Victorian poets.

Just such a type of poetry was never seen before. There have been enough poets completely absorbed as any of these later days in the life of the spirit, and treating it more exclusively. To Dante as to our own Spenser and Milton, all facts of earth find reality only as symbols of the soul's relation to God. Nor shall we ever again have deeper insight into the struggles of the soul than that shown by these great masters. But whatever dark and mighty problems might assail them, no question of the existence of a central truth invades their minds. Dante, with the geography of Heaven and Hell at his finger-tips, leads us with unfaltering steps from the Limbo-twilight through the black abyss and upward to the Rose of the Blessed bathed in light supernal. Spenser, joyously and serenely confident of the ideal of human life, weaves for us, with threads from the loom of classic and feudal past and a warp of sweet original imaginings, his definite pattern of perfect Christian manhood. Milton, convinced that he holds entire the divine truth formulated in a scheme of theology, sets forth deliberately, in resounding verse, "to justify the ways of God to man." The eighteenth

century, at once less assured and less concrete, begins to inquire and philosophize in verse; but its politely inquisitive temper has nothing in common with the agonized and solemn spirit in which the men of later days have sought the revelation of the truth. Great poetry in all previous times has moved to the music of assurance; ours, for the first time, moves to the music of doubt.

Men enough there have been, indeed, in earlier times, to whom the light of the unseen world was veiled, and the very being of God unrevealed. But we can only infer what pain may have moved restlessly at the heart of these mighty sons of the earth. Their work turns aside from futile inquiry and the analysis of shadows, to interpret the large, positive, illumined human life around. For Shakespeare, as for many of us moderns, this little life is rounded to a sleep, and the rest is silence. Yet even so, Shakespeare found this earth a good place and a noble, well worthy all the pain incident to its children; for the poet of "The Tempest" had the strong conviction, mysteriously lost to us, that human life is an end in itself, even though it lead nowhither. To the imagination of the modern world, the spirit is supreme, and without it the earth profiteth nothing; yet too often the spirit, veiled, eludes our quest and the beauty of dust mocks our desires.

The search for Truth, the search for God — to follow the modern poets upon this pilgrimage is to understand in large measure the spiritual movement of the Victorian age.

## 2. *The Poets of Doubt*

There is no Victorian poet, perhaps there is no Victorian thinker, more significant in position than Matthew Arnold. Agnosticism of thought and feeling, with all its vagueness, finds in him an exquisitely accurate exponent. No other poet has been so clear in his understanding of confusion, so positive in an unstable equilibrium. In the union of definiteness of technique with vagueness of theme the charm of his work resides. Unsatisfied desire, evasive regret, indecision, doubt, all that has not yet translated itself from the dim twilight of the feeling to the daylight world of the deed, — this Arnold gives us with delicate precision of touch. His poems are like gray shadows cast along some temple-floor, shadowy alike in clean purity of outline, and in dim uncertainty of content.

Matthew Arnold.

Death restores all values. During Arnold's lifetime, his keen, graceful, and versatile prose tended somewhat to eclipse his grave and quiet poetry. But no sooner did he leave us than the hold of his poems on the heart of the age was manifest. The brilliant critic, the Apostle of Culture, is already less distinct to the eyes of memory. As he vanishes, to many of us there appears in his place another figure — a younger Arnold, of mournful, clear, and searching glance, and firm lips which vainly try to repress their emotion. The author of "Literature and Dogma" gives way to

the author of "Empedocles on Ætna;" the critic and the would-be theologian grow dim before the poet.

What will be the respective value assigned to Arnold's prose and verse by the stern criticism of time, it is difficult to say. To a certain degree they reflect the same tendencies. But these tendencies in the prose receive a purely intellectual embodiment, hence they remain inert and cold. In the poetry they are fused with deep emotional ardor and translated into pure artistic beauty. His poems do not, indeed, possess that universality of touch which is the mark of the greatest poets; but they possess something only less rare — a sympathetic insight into certain phases of individual experience, and a rendering of these phases so delicately clear that it interprets the soul to itself, and by illuminating strengthens.

But Arnold's whole poetic achievement is contained in two slender volumes. In the very zenith of his powers he abandoned poetry and betook himself to prose. It seems difficult to believe that a man in whom the imaginative power was clear and strong could deliberately suppress it and turn from creation to criticism. Not thus has it been with our great poets, who, possessed by a force higher than themselves, were swept along by it to the end of life or strength; and we inevitably ask ourselves, Could the fire be intense and clear which so swiftly burned itself out? Can the man who seems to have tossed his inspiration away so lightly and contented himself with the dead

level of prose, ever have known real inspiration at all?

Thus this poetry challenges us at once with an initial paradox. It is not the only paradox we shall meet if we try to analyze Arnold's mournful power. We may find comprehension easier if we glance for a moment at the temper and the conditions of his life.

Arnold's was not a traditional poetic career. The first of the century accustomed us to an element of romantic irregularity in the lives of our poets. Shelley's wistful and disastrous efforts to live in the matter-of-fact world the life of dreamland, Byron's rebellious and picturesque career, and in no less degree the remote serenity wherein were passed the days of Wordsworth, — we find in all these something distinctive, apart from the average life of humdrum men. But Arnold's life was passed completely in the world: conventional, well-ordered, immersed in questions of the day, acquiescing in the traditions of society. His individuality was receptive rather than assertive. He did not guide his age, he was moulded by it; not, indeed, by the lower phases, from which he separated himself in voiceful scorn, nor by the material activities, from which he remained aloof in sad remoteness, but by the intellectual and moral influences which from childhood up surrounded him. To these he was most sensitively responsive. True, he became in later life an exact exponent of no one school of thought; and this because of his very responsiveness. He could

utterly reject no influence which reached him: in a measure he reflected them all.

The first strong influence under which Arnold fell was that of his father at Rugby. Dr. Arnold's training, admirable though it was, doubtless stimulated to unwholesome precocity the moral and religious instincts. The boys were plunged with the first dawn of consciousness into modern brooding over personal moral problems. At the same time the intellectual convictions fostered in them were those of the Broad Church — liberal and somewhat vague. From Rugby, Arnold went to Oxford. Here he found the same temper of spiritual analysis intensified, and united to intellectual convictions the exact reverse of those he had known. The Tractarian movement was at its height. Sunday after Sunday the tender voice of Newman sounded in his ears with unearthly pleading; the noble and gracious figure of Pusey was before him; the air around was full of deep and genuine Christianity, which thought itself identical with the ecclesiasticism of the Anglican Church. The change from Rugby to Oxford must have been bewildering indeed to a thoughtful boy. The same spirit of Christian ardor he found in two parties utterly antagonistic. What could it mean? One solution was obvious. The boy drifted towards it with many questionings and much sorrow — the man adopted it. Differing elements neutralized each other. Dogma vanished; the permanent factor — the spirit of sweetness and light — alone remained. This was the necessary end with a tem-

perament rather the passive meeting-ground of contending forces than a vigorous actor siding with one party in the fight. But the end — perhaps an unstable compromise at best — was not attained without bitterness, pain, and doubt. The struggle reflects itself in Arnold's poetry. Much else he gained from his Oxford years: an exquisite courtesy, a deep love for the culture of the past, a breadth of manner. These traits, in the best Oxford men of the day, played over the surface of burning and intense conviction; in the poems of Arnold they play with equal grace over the surface of negation, questioning, and pain.

After leaving Oxford, Arnold came in sharp contact with the wave of scientific Agnosticism which was sweeping over England. He was never overwhelmed by it. From much in its attitude he shrank; with several of its leaders he waged an urbane feud. Yet we may trace throughout his work the effect of the movement, in play with other forces. Thus living the life of the scholar and the thinker, both in and of the world, able rather to reproduce and to combine than to originate, Arnold reflects for us with singular truthfulness the composite and conflicting tendencies which marked the second third of the century.

We shall obviously expect in his poetry an intellectual and ethical bias. It will be introspective, self-searching, deficient in external movement; for the age does not thirst for objective adventure: our passion is of the soul, not the deed; our tumult within, not without. But Arnold has given us an

explicit and elaborate theory of poetry, and it is in flat contradiction to our expectations. He tells us, with his usual serene assurance, that the only legitimate subjects of poetry are actions, noble actions; and that all true poetry must appeal to the primary and permanent affections.

Vigorously he has tried to carry out his theory. In "Sohrab and Rustum" and "Balder Dead" he has worked carefully after the best classic models. Noble and objective in theme, simply straightforward in treatment, these poems almost attain true epic grandeur. Yet the saving word remains. Despite the felicity of phrasing and cadence, despite the breadth of handling and the profoundly touching nature of the stories, it is not by these poems that Arnold holds his place in our hearts. Rather is it by such verses as "Dover Beach" or the "Summer Night," or the haunting music of "The Buried Life" — poems which burn themselves into the memory by their subtle introspective power, which portray the sadness of the soul torn asunder by conflicting forces, and, in the rush and whirl of life, unable to find the centre whence it shall react upon the world. And if these, his characteristic poems, have in them no hint of action, they are equally removed from reflecting the primary or the permanent emotions. They reflect the questioning spirit of a transitional age; no primitive or simple soul has sung them, but a nature sensitive with most elaborate culture. Fancy the bewilderment of Dan Chaucer, the disgust of one of our New England farmers, did

fate force him to follow the subtle disquisitions of Empedocles on Ætna! They are of the present, these poems, and even in the present they appeal to a limited class. Here our second paradox meets us. With all the power of his conscious art Arnold has tried to square his work with his conception and to reproduce the direct and unconscious poetry of the past; but the remoteness of his theory only enhances the significance of his practice. The age is too strong for him — the age and his own soul; they force him to a poetry which is for the few, not the many; of the present, not of eternity; of thought, not act.

And for us to-day, the very power of these poems consists in their intensely modern tone. Whether they will retain their charm when the phases which they reflect are matters no longer of experience but of history, is hard to say; yet we cannot conceive their passing into oblivion; for they are rendered with artistic workmanship and inspiration of a high order, and art is eternal, though the embodied emotion become sympathetic rather than direct. We have little in common to-day with the theology of Milton or of Æschylus, yet the world does not forget the Paradise Lost or the Prometheus Bound. May we not hope a like fate for the work of Arnold?

In any study of this poetry one must, indeed, pause long with delight over the purely artistic qualities. They possess, to begin with, one necessary mark of a great poet — they are distinctive. One cannot hear the merest touch from one of

Arnold's finer poems without recognizing the author: —

> "The day in his hotness,
> The strife with the palm,
> The night in her silence,
> The stars in their calm." [1]

> "And with joy the stars perform their shining,
> And the sea its long moon-silvered roll." [2]

They are as individual as Shakespeare's

> "And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death;" —

or Milton's

> "That undisturbèd song of pure concent,
> Aye sung before the sapphire-color'd throne."

This originality of Arnold is strongly emphasized in the very metres which he chooses. His ordinary lyrical movements are simple and clear, he avoids the involved sonorous and elaborate schemes dear to the soul of Swinburne or Rossetti; but he much affects a peculiar structure, seemingly lawless, yet in reality governed by the melody of a constant foot. Such poems as "The Forsaken Merman" or "The Future" have in their swaying cadences a weird and haunting music not easily forgotten. Only a sure hand could venture on these irregular movements, which combine the charm of apparent spontaneity with a singular and perfect control.

Not for him is the dim suggestion, which clings as a glorified and prismatic halo about the poems

[1] Interlude to *Empedocles on Ætna*.
[2] *Self-Dependence*.

of Rossetti. The verse of Arnold is bathed in tranquil light. Each detail is rendered with the delicate precision of sympathy; and in time this simple and unswerving truthfulness, this selection untinged by passion, comes to hold us with a firmness peaceful and grave. The absence of sidelights is perhaps the reason that Arnold's poetry is often counted cold, yet the chiseled purity of his outlines has an indescribable and touching power of its own. He concentrates a vision in an epithet. The effect which in another poet would occupy two or three lines, he conveys in one felicitous light-flashing compound.

> "Ye storm-winds of Autumn,
> Who rush by, who shake
> The window, and ruffle
> The *gleam-lighted* lake!" [1]

exclaims the lover; and the whole sheet of steely water is before us. The poet speaks of the voice of Marguerite, and we feel the very spirit of English country: —

> "Say, has some wet *bird-haunted* English lawn
> Lent it the music of its trees at dawn?" [2]

Or we have the aspect of the twilight ocean: —

> "We bathed our hands with speechless glee
> That night, in the *wide-glimmering* sea." [3]

Arnold has a strong preference for certain special aspects in nature. He turns instinctively to the steadfast and the cool. A fresh air with something of the sting of early morning blows

[1] *Switzerland.* [2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Resignation. To Fausta.*

through his pages. Never was there such a poet for hot weather. Fancy the refreshment, in a midsummer noon, of reading lines like these: —

> "Sand-strewn caverns, cool and deep,
> Where the winds are all asleep,
> Where the spent lights quiver and gleam,
> Where the salt weed sways in the stream,
> Where the sea-beasts, ranged all round,
> Feed in the ooze of their pasture-ground,
> Where the sea-snakes coil and twine,
> Dry their mail, and bask in the brine;
> Where great whales come sailing by,
> Sail and sail with unshut eye
> Round the world forever and aye." [1]

If in the scene there mingles a note of austerity, the power of the poet grows more assured. There are few more wonderful passages than that study of the Grande Chartreuse where all surroundings reflect the frigid solemnity of the inner life: —

> "The silent courts, where night and day
> Into their stone-carved basins cold
> The splashing icy fountains play,
> The humid corridors behold —
> Where ghost-like in the deepening night
> Cowl'd forms brush by in gleaming white.
>
> "The chapel where no organ's peal
> Invests the stern and naked prayer!
> With penitential cries they kneel
> And wrestle; rising then, with bare
> And white uplifted faces stand,
> Passing the host from hand to hand." [2]

Arnold's attitude towards nature is distinctive. He never, like Shelley, ascribes to natural forces,

[1] *The Forsaken Merman.*
[2] *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse.*

to wind and bird and river, the emotions of his own restless soul; yet he never loses the consciousness of self. He has no part in the contemplative and impersonal rapture of Wordsworth. Never for a moment can he identify himself with the joy of the blossom, merge his own life till thought expires in the glory of the rising sun. He remains aloof, an unimpassioned spectator; noting with tender truthfulness every detail, but feeling keenly that between his life and the life of nature there is a great gulf fixed. Of the passion and wild joy of the natural world, indeed, he is hardly conscious; it is the grandeur of accomplished Duty, of unflinching obedience to Law, which constitute for him the glory of ocean and river and mountain. Thus severe, steadfast, and grand are the aspects that he renders. He is the poet of the sea — the sea, with its infinite yet obedient freedom, with its freshness and its calm. He is the poet of the moonlight, of the tranquil and unclouded heaven suffused with a radiance clearer than that of day. He is above all the poet of the high mountains. Not even Shelley nor Wordsworth has rendered like him their majesty; the fullness of mysterious suggestion in the Romantic writers could ill convey purity so august and so serene. But Arnold, with his constant tone of remoteness, has perfectly recorded the isolated grandeur of the hills — that grandeur terrestrial, not celestial, yet possessing an eternal strength, an immutable and untainted glory. Again and again does Arnold instinctively turn to the mountains.

The lover tossed by the hot storms of passion hears above them all the murmured summons of the untouched heights; the soul exhausted by the struggles of the revolution, flees for refuge to the solitude of those pastures, which yet cannot release it from its individual pain: —

"Yes, though the virgin mountain-air
Fresh through these pages blows,
Though to these leaves the glaciers spare
The soul of their mute snows;

"Though here a mountain murmur swells
Of many a dark-boughed pine;
Though as you read, you hear the bells
Of the high-pasturing kine;

"Yet through the hum of torrent lone
And brooding mountain-bee,
There sobs I know not what ground-tone
Of human agony."[1]

Here an emphasis is laid on the contrast between the soul and the world; but often Arnold gives us perfect pictures in which the ethical suggestion is so delicate that it is hardly felt: —

"Thin, thin the pleasant human noises grow,
And faint the city gleams;
Rare the lone pastoral huts — marvel not thou,
The solemn peaks but to the stars are known,
But to the stars, and the cold lunar beams;
Alone the sun arises, and alone
Spring the great streams."[2]

This self-sufficing calm, remote from the pas-

[1] *Stanzas in Memory of the Author of Obermann*, November, 1849.

[2] *In Utrumque Paratus.*

sions and interests of man, is felt throughout Arnold's pellucid interpretation of Nature. He sees in her no mere mirror of human experience; she is to him a perpetual example and a silent reproach. To man's restlessness she opposes peace; to his passion, an impersonal coolness; to his wild and ungoverned license, the steadfastness of perfect obedience. In contemplating her the poet does not find a wild inspiration nor an uplifting joy; but he does find a refuge and refreshment in weariness, and, higher yet, a stern and moral power: —

> "Still do thy sleepless ministers move on,
> Their glorious tasks in silence perfecting,
> Still working, blaming still our vain turmoil,
> Laborers that shall not fail when man is gone."[1]

It is a "starting, feverish heart" that Arnold brings to this high peace — a heart that cannot bury itself indifferently in the past, and yet feels itself, with sad disgust, an alien from the present and the actual. The rush and heat and blatant materialism of the age fill Arnold with scornful pain: —

> "We see all sights from pole to pole,
> And glance and nod and hurry by,
> And never once possess our soul
> Before we die."[2]

Such is his exclamation. In the midst of his dissatisfaction he turns wistfully to the calm steadfastness of nature; he turns with equal yearning to the faith and life of the past, in which he sees an assurance and a peace that can never return

[1] Sonnet: *Quiet Work.* [2] *A Southern Night.*

again. Through all his poems there runs, in mournful and touching undertone, a note of deep regret. His sympathetic insight into many phases of past thought has often proved perplexing to his readers. Himself no Christian, he wrote most tenderly and wistfully of the early Christian days. Most modern of moderns, he identified himself in a common loss with the strictest mediæval order. He reproduced for us, with a heart on flame, the cold and statuesque nobility of the Hellenic world. To all this paradox the answer stands plain. He turned back yearningly to each and all of these phases; for in all alike he found what he missed and lamented in himself — a faith that was clear and a life that was serene. We are impelled to apply to him his own lines on his master, Obermann: —

> "Again I hear the words inspire
> Their mournful calm: serene,
> Yet tinged with infinite desire
> For all that might have been."[1]

In this desire for "what might have been," Arnold is not alone. In a measure he reflects us all. There are none who fail to realize with sadness the flux in which all that seemed most stable, from the traditions of the social order to the conception of the unseen, has been carried away. But keenly though we may enjoy Arnold's delicate voicing of a universal pain, we cannot rest contented if he gives us nothing more. No man can spend his entire strength in regret. What com-

[1] *Obermann Once More.*

fort does he bring us, and wherein are his sources of life?

His strength is largely negative. There is no militant element in his attitude. To conquer evil, to reform abuses, is not for him. To him, as to Hamlet, "the world is out of joint;" but he is troubled with no grievous fear that he was born "to set it right." Vaguely he dreams of a happier future: there may be, must be, men who by their struggles shall create it; but the task is not his. His rather the silent desert, whence he may watch the pomp of life pass by, and in mournful peace wait the event.

> "There yet, perhaps, may dawn an age,
> More fortunate, alas, than we,
> Which without hardness may be sage,
> And gay without frivolity.
> Sons of the world, oh, haste those years;
> But while we wait, allow our tears."[1]

Yet tears are not the only refuge for the doubting and unhappy spirit, even while it waits passive for the sons of the present world to work towards the coming day. Arnold cannot goad us on to active and joyous effort; his own hopelessness is too deep for that. But without resistance he will not leave his soul to suffer. He meets his feverish doubt, his vague unrest, with a stern and distinct message. It is the message of repression. His subtle discontent he strives to stifle. He preaches a noble courage, a self-contained fortitude; but it is the courage of resignation, not of activity.

[1] *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse.*

Better never aspire than to strive and fall. Our finer, vaguer instincts can never be fulfilled; they cause us pain, and pain is weakness. Let the instincts be crushed. Let us model our lives after the calm and quiet completeness of natural law; thus may we reach, if not the glorious serenity of the elder world, yet the noble poise which results from a symmetry perfect though sad.

Tranquillity and self-sufficient strength — these would seem to be Arnold's highest aim. That there was a time when they were not so we must infer. "Calm 's not life's crown, though calm is well!" he exclaims in an early lyric. But when his powers were at their prime, we find no hint of an ideal other than symmetry gained by repression and self-control. Perfect is the unity which, in this respect, pervades his work. We have seen how largely the artistic charm of metre and method consisted in severe restraint. The severity of phrase is equaled by the severity of mood. In Arnold's few love-poems the theme is always sacrifice. The heart flees the tumultuous passion, which weakens or degrades its self-centred strength; the lover plunges into solitude: —

> "I struggle towards the light: and ye,
> Once longed-for storms of love,
> If with the light ye cannot be,
> I bear that ye remove." [1]

The same tone is felt through all his treatment of religious unrest and social discontent. All which agitates and excites is to be abjured; all

[1] *Switzerland.*

beginnings of which the end is withheld shall be rejected.

And verily if the gospel of repression be true; if a resolute satisfaction in the attainable, in the finite conditions of human life, be the only rational ideal; if Stoicism, in short, is the only genuine gospel that the world has seen, — then, indeed, we can ask nothing nobler than this ideal of Arnold. Our minds must thrill in acquiescence, as well as in sympathy, with his Pagan philosopher: —

"Is it so light a thing
To have enjoyed the sun,
To have lived light in the Spring,
To have loved, to have thought, to have done,
To have advanced true friends and beat down baffling foes,

"That we must feign a bliss
Of doubtful future date,
And, while we dream on this,
Lose all our present state,
And relegate to worlds yet distant our repose?
. . . . . .
"I say, fear not! Life still
Leaves human effort scope.
But, since life teems with ill,
Nurse no extravagant hope;
Because thou must not dream, thou needst not then despair." [1]

The life self-contained and self-sufficient, demanding no tribute from without, torn by no eager passion to soar freely and break through the limits of natural law, has never been sung with nobility so musical and so austere. A cold, self-centred, barren ideal we may call this when we view it baldly, disenthralled from the melodious

[1] *Empedocles on Ætna.*

and melancholy charm which the poet wreathes around. Yet it has a greatness of its own. To many it seems, in its confessed sadness, nobler, because truer, than that later attitude adopted by the great critic, when he refused to admit the necessity of sacrifice, and endeavored, in the glow of his own emotions divorced from intellectual faith, to find sufficient inspiration for a life that denied its own despair. In his poems he is at least sincere; he reflects for us truthfully the confusion and the pain that surrounds the life of man, the serene and joyous calm wherein moves the life of nature. Surely for this we owe him our gratitude: —

> "Fate gave, what fate could not control,
> His sad lucidity of soul."

But, alas! his principles worked themselves out to an inevitable conclusion. From agitation and emotion he sought to escape to the untroubled calm of self-poise. But poetry, however cold, sustained, remote, yet knows emotion for its soul; and the altitude that seeks to reject emotion can express itself in poetic form only so long as the aim is not perfectly attained. Arnold achieved his desire; and the end was silence. Control had done its work; he had repressed his poetry out of existence. It is the record of a struggle that tended to self-destruction. Henceforth he could pour forth indefinitely keen criticism and impersonal speculation; but of the expression of the spirit he could give us nothing, for the light of the spirit had been quenched.

In its broad outline, the experience of Arnold is of course typically and distinctively modern. Popular heroes of romance reflect it; men of letters, whether an English Mark Pattison or a Swiss Amiel, reproduce it; and many a rare, obscure soul, sinking yet more swiftly into silence, is known only by inference even to its next of spiritual kin. But among poets, the truest brother in spirit to Arnold is Arthur Hugh Clough. Close friends and companions, the two were in boyhood and early manhood subjected to the same training and influences at Rugby and Oxford. In Clough, as in his friend, the flood of scientific skepticism rushed mercilessly over the ardent religious instincts developed by education. They were both sons of the early Victorian age, when social consciousness had not yet become dominant over the individualism even of the inner life; yet both reacted with vigor and sorrow against the outward materialism of the times. Neither could find a home in the accepted Christian tradition. Poets of the intellectual emotions, the character in each was — shall we say too weak, or too evenly balanced? — to yield itself unfalteringly to any influence, and clearness of vision ended in feebleness of will. Clough, like Arnold, drifted, swayed by the ebb and flow of opposing currents; his poetry also gains its special and intimate power from its revelation of the agony of the spirit; and he, too, succumbed to the disease of inaction, and allowed his poetic impulse to be sterilized by the surrounding chill.

Arthur Hugh Clough.

Yet to the close observer, there is a searching difference in the temper of the two men. Far less polished than Arnold's, Clough's poetry yet shows in some respects a freer and broader power. His outlook on modern society is more manly, as more specific in severity; and his pungent gift of mockery is foreign to Arnold's pensive grace and musical despair. But the spiritual attitude of the two is wider apart than their artistic or social temper. We read Arnold's laments over the past, his intense longing for steadfastness and peace, and the conviction grows upon us that his keenest regret is not faith but assurance, less the truth which the world has forfeited than the tranquillity which the truth produced. He craves with an almost querulous desire the unquestioning and serene spirit, which has fled never to return. Passing to the pages of his friend, we find pain of a different order — the agonized desire for a faith that is lost, and for a distant God. Tranquillity is the supreme end of Arnold's ambition; the Truth alone could satisfy the soul of Clough.

> "Resolve to be thyself: and know that he
> Who finds himself loses his misery," [1]

is Arnold's supreme wisdom. Clough reverses the cry. Let sorrow be his heritage, if only God endure: —

> "It fortifies my soul to know
> That though I perish, Truth is so.
> That howsoe'er I stray and range,
> Where'er I go, Thou dost not change.
> I steadier step when I recall
> That if I slip, Thou dost not fall."

[1] *Self-Dependence.*

This is the message not of self-dependence, but of self-abnegation. Intellectually agnostic as Arnold, the poetry of Clough marks a new spiritual stage. Out of the very heart of doubt and self-despair he wrests a religious fervor as deep and reverent, one is almost tempted to say, as that of Thomas à Kempis or Dante. The very life of the soul, its aspiration and its honesty, its blended hope and fear, quiver through these most modern lines: —

"O Thou whose image in the shrine
Of human spirits dwells Divine;
Which from that precinct once conveyed
To be to outer day displayed,
Dost vanish, part, and leave behind
Mere blank and void of empty mind,
Which willful fancy seeks in vain
With casual shapes to fill again!

"O Thou that in our bosom's shrine
Dost dwell, unknown because Divine,
I sought to speak, I thought to say,
'The light is here,' 'Behold the way,'
'The Voice was thus,' and 'thus the Word,'
And 'thus I spoke,' and 'thus I heard,' —
But from the lips that half-essayed,
The imperfect utterance fell unmade.

"O Thou, in that mysterious shrine,
Enthroned, as I must say, Divine,
I will not frame one thought of what
Thou mayst either be or not;
I will not prate of 'thus' and 'so,'
And be profane with 'yes' and 'no' —
Enough that in my soul and heart
Thou, whatsoe'er Thou mayst be, art.

"Do only Thou in that dim shrine,
Known or unknown, remain Divine,
There, or if not, at least in eyes
That scan the fact that round them lies;
The hand to sway, the judgment guide,
In sight and sense thyself divide —
Be Thou but there — in mind and heart,
I will not ask to feel Thou art." [1]

Verily the soul is here lost that it may be found. Renunciation could not be more absolute than in the temper which asks not even a dim intuition of the Godhead, if only the unknown Divine may shape the human life to the law of Duty. Like Arnold, Clough never denies that if religious certainty is over, the joy and freedom of life are gone; unlike Arnold he escapes from knowledge of self to hope of God. Arnold's tranquillity, if attained, would shut away forever all hope of spiritual insight; for so long as the soul suspects the existence of an absolute verity, it may know faith and pain and hope and woe, but it can never know quiescence. His ideal brings to the soul at best the serene and barren calm of subservience to natural law. Better than this the despairing self-abnegation of Clough, the dim hope that there is a Truth though we never attain it, a God though we never find Him. Clough's poetry marks the furthest reach of the devout spirit consistent with entire agnosticism of thought.

[1] Ὕμνος ἄυμνος.

### 3. *The Poets of Art*

"If the sun and moon should doubt,
They 'd immediately go out,"

remarks William Blake, with direct and delightful quaintness. The imaginative powers of Clough and Arnold were mainly occupied with doubting; and though they did not "go out" immediately, they faded with strange but inevitable swiftness into the twilight of prose or the darkness of utter silence.

The Æsthetic Reaction.

Yet what light may gleam through the poetry of Clough and Arnold is genuine and from a natural source. There is another group of poets whose work is illumined by an unreal glamour, like the radiance which streams from an electric light, intensifying color and distorting form, but of almost magical beauty.

It may seem useless, in discussing the spiritual struggles of modern poetry, to touch upon the work of Rossetti, Morris, and Swinburne. We may even fear lest they should divert us from our quest.

"Were it not better done, as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair?"

Yet this school of poets marks a distinct phase in the progress of the spiritual imagination. Without them a stage in the struggle of the soul would remain unrecorded, a line of solution untried. Despite earthly themes and æsthetic emphasis, the true place of the school can only be found

through its relation to the spiritual movement of the age. It stands for a defiant and conscious neglect of that subtle search for the Truth which moves the other Victorian poets. The animating principle of all its varied work is a profound lassitude with thought. To escape from the sting of undiscovered truth and the long torment of thought-activity, to a world where the ringing call to action should never be heard nor the whisper of doubt penetrate, to take refuge in a region "where music and moonlight and feeling are one," is the aim of the poets of the æsthetic reaction.

Among the Victorians, Rossetti, Swinburne, and Morris are the chief exponents of the technical Romantic movement. From the first of the century, this movement had been vigorous and vital. "A great civilization," writes Mr. Watts, "having reached the stage of acceptance, has turned back, and become haunted by a sense of mystery as deep as ever." This "Renascence of Wonder" had asserted itself in its picturesque aspect with Scott, in its æsthetic aspect with Keats, in its spiritual aspect with Coleridge. All these poets have the "beauty touched with strangeness" which is the note of romantic art. But romanticism is with them all instinct, not dogma. To make it dogma, consciously to emphasize its two factors of realism and symbolism, — factors contradictory yet alike essential, — was left for the studied work of the later school of Rossetti.

The assumptions of this school and of the poets of doubt are identical, — agnosticism as to spir-

itual facts. The two groups draw for a moment very near historically, when we find in one number of "The Germ" — modest and fervid little organ of the fervid and modest young pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood — a sympathetic criticism of two new poems, Arnold's "Strayed Reveller," and Clough's "Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich." But however the thought-outlook may agree, and whatever eager thread of sympathy may thrill from one delightful young group to another, the schools develop in contrary directions. Clough and Arnold live, as truly as Rossetti, in a land of shadows; but while to the poets of doubt the twilight is abhorrent, to the poets of art it is dear. Mystery, hated by the first school, is by the second hailed and sought; to the first conviction is the supreme desire, to the other emotion, vivid and subjective, is the adequate end of life.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Emotion itself, to be complete, must include the religious element. The devotional feelings, of consecration, sacrifice, and adoration, are the finest part of man's emotional heritage. And so it comes to pass that Rossetti, at least, is a deeply religious, indeed a deeply Christian poet. Far from denying the Christian dogma, he absorbs it all, in its most heightened or Catholic form, and expresses it with ardent, genuine, and unperplexed devotion. The æsthetic and emotional value of the Christian ideal and the spiritual attitude of the Church were never more exquisitely rendered than in his early

work. A sacramental calm rests upon it, a hush of awed sincerity.

"This is that blessed Mary, preëlect
God's Virgin. Gone is a great while, and she
Dwelt young in Nazareth of Galilee.
Unto God's will she brought devout respect,
Profound simplicity of intellect
And supreme patience. From her mother's knee
Faithful and hopeful; wise in charity;
Strong in grave peace; in pity circumspect.

So held she through her girlhood; as it were
An angel-watered lily, that near God
Grows and is quiet. Till one dawn at home,
She woke in her white bed, and felt no fear
At all, — yet wept till sunshine, and felt awed;
Because the fullness of the time was come." [1]

Assuredly, he who penned these lines was one of the faithful, nor can we question the personal genuineness of the man who on his deathbed called for a priest to absolve him from his sins.

Yet nothing is surer than that Rossetti never possessed even the shadow of intellectual conviction. He never questioned, but he never believed. He was serene and fervid in his choice of a Christian environment; the reality of such environment was to him matter of complete indifference. Reality, indeed, outside of personal emotion, had for him scant meaning. His Lady Beauty was a dream-woman after all. As his own Beryl-Stone, his poetry is strewn with shuddering light, like the cloud-nest of the wading moon; but the light is an enchanted gleam from within, no simple reflection of a sun without. Ros-

[1] Sonnet: *Mary's Girlhood.*

setti might say with his master, Keats, "I have no opinion upon anything in the world, except upon matters of taste." As his work goes on, the Christian tone lessens, the Christian themes are discarded; and although in such a poem as the wonderful "Rose-Mary," the Catholic setting remains, strange recondite and unhallowed imagery is added to the symbols of faith, to enhance the sense of wonder which is the soul of his poetry. Weird and spiritual are indeed often confused in Rossetti. It is easy enough to read, between the lines of his glowing emotion and intense visual imaginings, his genuine creed; and that creed is simple. A solemn sense of vast encompassing Mystery, a conviction of the unfathomable depths of human passion, — these are its factors.

"The day is dark and the night
To him that would search their heart,
No lips of cloud that will part,
Nor morning song in the light:
Only, gazing alone,
To him wild shadows are shown,
Deep under deep unknown,
And height above unknown height.
Still we say as we go,
Strange to think by the way,
Whatever there is to know
That shall we know one day.

"The past is over and fled,
Named new, we name it the old,
Thereof some tale hath been told,
But no word comes from the dead,
Whether at all they be,
Or whether as bond or free,
Or whether they too were we,

Or by what spell they were sped,
Still we say as we go,
'Strange to think by the way
Whatever there is to know
That shall we know one day.'

"The sky leans dumb on the sea
Aweary with all its wings —
And oh! the song the sea sings
Is dark everlastingly.
Our past is clean forgot,
Our present is and is not,
Our future 's a sealed seed-plot,
And what betwixt them are we?
We who say as we go,
'Strange to think by the way,
Whatever there is to know,
That shall we know one day." [1]

Sometimes, as in "Soothsay," or in the sonnet "Last Days," an unaccustomed ethical note, stern, sad, piercing, reaches us, but a note of religious conviction never. In its fervid and sacred color, invaded by gathering dusk, though seemingly the triumph of the day, Rossetti's poetry represents to us the full image of the afterglow of religious emotion, when the sun of religious truth has set.

Rossetti's poetry, full of delicate and devout mysticism, subdued to a worshipful peace, seems to entice us with a spirituality more fervid and more absolute than is to be found elsewhere in our modern poets. And if we shrink with unconscious impulse from applying the term "spiritual" to the poet of the "House of Life,"

William Morris.

[1] *The Cloud-Confines.*

it is with an undertone of reproach that lines from "Ave" or "World's Worth" sing themselves through our mind.

Yet the thought of Dante Gabriel Rossetti clashes against a genuine religious temper with absurd incongruity. And if we ask why, we may find indeed a partial answer in our knowledge of his lack of all conviction; but a fuller answer waits us in the work of his followers. So far as the attitude towards spiritual truth is concerned, the sequence in the æsthetic poets can be traced, swift, clear, and terrible. The instability of religion founded not on conviction but on emotion could not be more clearly shown.

It was in 1857 that Burne-Jones, Swinburne, and Morris became Rossetti's disciples. In painter, poet, and poet-painter alike, the power of the visual imagination met the yet greater power of symbolism and suggestion, and it is hard to say whether there is more poetry in their painting or painting in their verse. All, as Rossetti, imbued with romanticism in the highest sense, they all alike, while laying high stress on Beauty, value it as language rather than as end, and are thus less realist than mystic. Yet the change in the meaning of the beauty-word measures the gradual death of the spirit through their poetry and bends towards that baffling union of mysticism with materialism which has so strange a development in contemporary France.

As we turn from Rossetti to Morris, we notice first the likeness in artistic handling and method

that stamps the disciple. There is the same search for the recondite, though in Morris it is more often by the marvelous than by the symbolic that the search is gratified; there is an allied type of feminine beauty; there is technical handling of rhyme and metre stamped with the same school. And yet, through all likeness, there makes itself felt an increasing change.

The world of Morris is a world of forms and dreams, lacking the substantial verity even of emotion. Alone among modern poets he rests for poetic material entirely upon the past, and his inventive faculty is sterile. The deepest passion, human and spiritual, in his poems, comes from his sources, not from his own creative power. Ethical fatalism is inherent in the dark tale of Sigurd the Volsung; hints of higher meaning play always, delicately pure, through the mythologies of Greece and of the North. Such hints the poet of "The Earthly Paradise" heightens with modern art: he adds to them nothing. And despite the marvelous charm of the old stories and the grace of the telling, it is difficult to linger long in the world of Morris the poet. An intense narrowness has invaded his conception of life. One woman forever wanders through his varied climes, and we weary soon of clinging draperies, gray eyes, and tender feet. One young hero, superb, but if the truth be told, monotonous, beholds the maiden, loves, loses, wins, or dies. Delight in the deed is feeble in all the poets of art, and the blows that ring through the poems of Morris sound

hollow and false. If the motif of action is unused, the range of feeling even is narrowed. Emotion reduces itself to two phases or indeed to one; a solitary natural passion, death-haunted to the end. Of the subtleties of the inner life, he gives no hint. The whole world of experience so intimately known to Rossetti, the world where the soul meets or seeks the Eternal, is closed to him. In the first pre-Raphaelites religious passion was welded in strange and enthralling unison with the passion for earthly beauty. In Morris it has vanished.

With action and religion eliminated, with human intercourse reduced to its simplest and most primitive elements, what is left?

Pure charm of limpid verse and lovely picture. The æsthetic, which has in Rossetti subdued the other factors of life to its own service, has ended by suppressing them, and behold! the process is suicidal. The æsthetic itself, stifled, dies from sheer lack of air. The sad tale of the Wanderers, seeking eternal youth and in their heart-sick failure turning to dreams of the past for solace, — here is the true prototype of the lovely, vacant, sorrowful verse of Morris. Intense clinging to a life which is yet a little empty, intense horror of a death whose shadow, cast along the path beside terrified lovers, advances silently nearer day by day, — here, to Morris the poet, is human life.

"Death have we hated, knowing not what it meant,
Life have we loved, through green leaf and through sere,
Though still the less we knew of its intent;
The Earth and Heaven through countless year on year

Slow-changing, were to us but curtains fair,
Hung round about a little room, where play
Weeping and laughter of man's empty day." [1]

To Morris the poet. With Morris the socialist we are not dealing. A new life was to come to the prophet and champion of the social democracy; but he was to find it by breaking loose from all traditions of æstheticism, and by flinging himself full on life.

"From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever Gods may be
That no life lives forever;
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea." [2]

Algernon Charles Swinburne.

Fear of death will turn to longing for death at last; for in the Garden of Proserpine all fear is stilled. If to Morris life is empty, to Swinburne life is cruel. In his gentlest mood a cry for oblivion; in reckless, restless moods defiance of God, man, and fate; — here, so far as any thought analysis is possible to apply to sheer wind-music, is the basis of Swinburne's temper. Passion is still a spiritual worship to Rossetti; to Morris it is natural and æsthetic delight; to the poet of "Chastelard" it is a flame in the flesh, consuming one may not say the soul, but the very consciousness itself. The plaintive and melodious fear of death which runs

[1] Epilogue to *The Earthly Paradise.*
[2] *The Garden of Proserpine.*

in minor note through the poetry of Morris we sometimes suspect to be an artistic motif, resorted to because motifs are scant: the shuddering horror of death, alternating with morbid craving for oblivion, which rings through the poetry of Swinburne, is genuine as anything can be genuine in this poetry of harmonious sound rather than of imagination all compact. Intellectual conviction is already lost, in Rossetti; but the world of spiritual experience and emotion remains seemingly intact, with its fine sensations, subtle joys, and exquisitely significant sorrows. To Morris this world has passed away; the heavens are closed and the inner life is vacant. Yet the earth is still very good and life is sweet, though simple to the verge of tameness; and if through all the joy of elemental love and natural beauty there breathes a thought of pain and fear, that thought does but enhance the dearness of the present. But to Swinburne the present has neither sacredness nor charm. Acknowledging no sphere but that of the senses and the passions, unable to ignore the dreams of heaven or to escape knowledge that there exists in the world a gospel of renunciation sad and stern, Swinburne finds life bitter at the core. Far from contentment in a dream world of Christianity like Rossetti, or in a dream world of art like Morris, he resorts to denunciation of the faith which he denies. It would be unreasonable to lay overmuch stress on poetic declamation, often doubtless written for effect, in the absence of more positive inspiration; yet bravado is in itself significant,

and this resounding and empty verse witnesses to the hollowness of life when the Spirit of Life is denied. We look in vain for a positive gospel, religious or social, in the unequaled music of Swinburne. Pæans on a liberty which is negation of restraint, and has advanced not one whit beyond the revolutionary conception of Byron; pæans on man, coupled with the denial of the best that man has thought; — such are the substitutes for religion in the last of the æsthetic school.

The poets of art have vainly sought to build up a creative literature on a basis of accepted negation. All that gives depth and variety to their poetry is the lingering influence of the spiritual convictions which they discard. As this influence dies away, poetry fades into externality, and vanishes in rebellion which is not sufficiently intellectual even to sustain interest. The poets of doubt found brief but real inspiration in bemoaning the loss of spiritual vision: the poets of art find inspiration less genuine and hardly longer sustained in ignoring the existence of such loss. From unreal intensity, the poetry of art passes into monotonous languor, and sinks at last into a gulf of the senses from which no inflation of outworn political ideals and no effort to give to audacious rebellion the substantial force of faith, can ultimately or long redeem it.

### 4. *Tennyson and "In Memoriam"*

One of the rare coincidences of fact with ideal justice placed the laurel upon the brows of Tennyson. He may not have been the most highly dowered of the Victorian poets in spontaneous poetic impulse; but he gave us, in many ways, the widest poetic achievement. He hardly led men to new heights of vision, but he purged their eyes to clearer insight in the region where they stood. If the poet of "Saul" is the leader of the modern seekers for truth, the poet of "In Memoriam" is their representative.

The Modern Soul.

For Tennyson had one of those choice natures of the second order, which are formed by surrounding influences, and serve for the future as types of the age in which they live. He did not transcend his time: he revealed it. Disciple of the romantic movement, his first ideals in verse are shaped by the touch of Keats, his choice of mediæval themes held him in the romantic tradition, and he continued to the end master of the technique of romantic art. Yet it was the modern scientific movement in its ethical bearing that shaped his graver thought; and the friend of Maurice was plunged deep in the religious problems of the day.

We find in Tennyson all the phases of temper characteristic of poets of the minor schools. The æsthetic philosophy is searched by him with a sympathy born of experience, as witnesses "The Palace of Art." Yet for him as for Clough and

Arnold, we may say, with a touch of paradox, that passion centred in the life of thought. Neither Arnold nor Clough illustrates more fully the modern reflective method, or the transfer of the drama from the stage of outer action to that of inward consciousness. A far wider man, not only in his writing but in his personality, Tennyson yet belongs largely to the same tradition. The son of a clergyman, he grew up like the younger poets in the atmosphere of Anglican Christianity, and was deeply imbued with its controlled beauty, and impressed by its emphasis on the inner life. Like them, he was exposed to the strong reaction towards scientific skepticism that marked the opening half of Victoria's reign. Out of this double influence issued his poetry.

With such equipment of temperament and tradition, and with a poetic equipment unsurpassed in delicate resources, the young Tennyson awaited his inspiration. In 1833 it came to him. The Shadow "that keeps the keys of all the creeds" crossed his pathway; and he set forth, with the sharp consciousness of loss upon him, on the quest of immortal love.

"In Memoriam" appeared in 1850. It is the central poem of the century, not only in date, but in scope and character. In its complexity and inwardness, its passion pulsing through every vein of thought, its faltering inconsistencies and slow approaches, it has caught the very movement of the age. In structure it is organic and vital. Supreme among elegies, it is more than an elegy:

it is the epic of a soul, rendered not symbolically, as in the "Divine Comedy," but with a directness native to a scientific age. More than Clough's "Dipsychus" or Arnold's "Empedocles," the poem lays bare to us the interior life of the typical modern mind.

Perhaps the first thing that impresses us is Tennyson's rejection of literary conventionality. He throws aside the classical tradition that neither Milton nor Shelley can discard. The ideal landscape of "Adonais" gives place to the sweet English country, with its wide autumnal meadows, dripping woods, and gentle skies. Roses and myrtles yield "to the little speedwell's darling blue," the foxglove, and the laburnum. The paraphernalia of mythical mourners has vanished, and the soul, without even figures of speech to support it, is left in the utter solitude of grief.

In this grave simplicity of method, the character of Tennyson is clearly manifest. It is no generalized mourner as in "Adonais" or "Lycidas:" it is Alfred Tennyson, the lineaments of whose inner life show plainly through the veil of sorrow. He is sensitive, reticent, courageous, emphatically the modern man. The awfulness of his experience shakes the very centre of his being;[1] yet almost the first sign of recurring life in the paralysis of sorrow is the cry of the awakening will, "that will not be the fool of loss." His firmer mind is formed, not, as in weak natures, by flight from memory, but by "treasuring the look it cannot

[1] Canto IV.

find, the words that are not heard again."[1] The subtlety of thought and feeling is manifest in every line. It is a high-minded nature that finds not consolation but an added pain in dwelling on the commonness of grief.[2] Deeply controlled, as the very metre reveals with its outward evenness and inward throb of reiterated pain, the poet shows, in most tense reaches of emotion, in the very moment when he seeks dread intercourse with the Spirit that has fled, an unfaltering sanity.[3] Dowered with the modern consciousness that not only suffers but watches itself suffer, Tennyson adds to his natural sorrow "the imaginative woe that loves to handle spiritual strife."[4] Lifting his experience out of the personal into the typical after our modern fashion, and uniting it with all possible broader issues of the inner life, the Tennyson of "In Memoriam" has given us a poem which is indeed universal, but which derives its peculiar force to us from its revelation of the modern soul.

The Modern Method.

"In Memoriam" is a poem of triumph, but of triumph overcast. The pall of gloom that broods heavily above the soul at the beginning is indeed soon broken by far, sad regions of light. Towards the end the sun itself streams forth, illumining the sorrow to beauty; but it is an English sunlight, white, not golden, still filtered through a veil of pensive mists.

It is difficult to conceive a poem wider and more subtle in rendering the possible sufferings of a

[1] Canto XVIII. [2] Canto VI.
[3] Canto XCIV. [4] Canto LXXXV.

soul shaken free from all convention by the shock of pain. Problems of the mind, the conduct, and the heart blend and break, one against the other, with the pathetic inconsistency, the alternations of fervor and stupor, of sorrowful life itself. In the Prelude, Cantos 1–28, the forces, stunned by sorrow, gather themselves together for conflict. In the first Cycle, Cantos 28–78, sometimes called the Cycle of the Past, are concentrated the most poignant problems of thought; in the second, the Cycle of the Present, Cantos 78–104, are faced the problems of the life of feeling and action which the soul, on earth, cannot escape; while in the Cycle of the Future, Cantos 104–119, the outlook is mainly towards an ideal social order, and the humanity to be. The concluding poems give the summary and interpretation, in the light of faith won at last, of the great problem. From the very beginning, the personal grief is taken up into a larger sorrow. The problem that confronts the poet is to find a witness to eternal life in the presence of that vast witness to perpetual death seemingly given by nature and our human fears. The great question is viewed, now from the side of emotion, now from that of thought, and at times the shore of assurance seems far away. In the fluctuating motion that tosses the bitter foam of doubt over most dear and sacred desires, one firm fact alone remains, giving to the poem the necessary coherence of structure. It is the constancy of human love on earth, to which from the beginning the poet desperately and blindly clings. Be-

fore the end of the great soul-epic, this constancy, gathering to itself all of thought and feeling that can minister to faith, becomes to him the calm revealer of a love beyond the grave.

"In Memoriam," taken as a whole, has a tone profoundly Christian, it advances towards a triumphant and Christian end. Yet, if we regard not conclusion but method, we find the poem in essence skeptical. Its agnosticism lies intellectually though not spiritually as deep as its Christianity, its very faith is of the agnostic type. For this faith is held by effort of the will, not by demonstration of reason. From the first awakening of volition when the fumes of sorrow roll away, to the final apostrophe: —

> "O Living Will that shalt endure
> When all that seems shall suffer shock,"

choice, not conviction, determines creed. There is much meditation suffused with thoughtful argument, but the arguments do but circle around the central problem, disposing of minor difficulties but never touching its gloomy heart. Next to the will, feeling is the great champion of faith. The heart in wrath gives to the cruel suggestions of reason the reiterated answer: "I have felt." They are lame hands of faith indeed that the poet stretches out. The final triumph won is that of simple trust: trust adequate to console and even to nerve to conduct, not adequate to create even the illusion of knowledge. Reason, Tennyson emphasizes again and again with calm and sad assurance, can never attain to truth. We must "faintly

trust the larger hope," "believing where we cannot prove;" and as this sad phrase confronts us in the Prologue, we find it once more at the very end, where once more we are bidden to trust "with faith that comes *of self-control*" " the truths that never can be proved " on earth.

The intellectual problems are indeed hardly met, much less answered; and yet, before the end, reason in a sense is satisfied. The movement of the poem is close to that of experience, far from that of pure thought, and hence comes its very vitality and power. Facts of nature and of the soul come to the poet whose love is clasping grief with desperate instinct, as mocking, hideous, serene denials of the spiritual truth for which he longs. Tortured, but touchingly sincere, the soul again and again faces and voices with unflinching completeness the message of despair: it then turns away, exhausted by the very intensity of thought-sorrow, and sinks for rest into the healing and normal sorrow of the heart. Long after, when much new experience has been entered, when the spirit has been strengthened by courageous endurance and the conquest of practical solutions, the same fact will recur: and behold! it is no longer dark with insidious denial, but the radiant witness to faith. In the mystery of sub-consciousness, the great change has been wrought.

Thus, for instance, the first hint of wider thought that comes to the dazed spirit is the terrible conception of nature as a great phantom, hollow and unsubstantial, the mere mocking image of man.

The conception is languidly dropped; for at first the pathetic hints at thought of the bruised spirit are lame and broken, and it is long before they have strength to gather themselves into consecutive sequence. But far later, in the triumphant conclusion, the idea reappears, and how different is its aspect! Once it forced the soul into the very solitude of death: now it is the joyous witness of perfect idealism. The world is shadow indeed, but the shadow of immortal spirit. The solid lands may melt like mists, like clouds may shape themselves and go: the poet knows that they exist as symbol only of eternal love.

The most striking instance of such recurrence and renewal, by which a thought that has been witness to death returns as witness to life, is in the crisis of the soul's experience. Through all the earlier stages, the poet has with passionate, tacit instinct refused to believe in Waste, and has grounded his intuition of immortal life on such refusal. Suddenly his faith deserts him. A conviction of the terrible wastefulness of nature, of her cruel, utter indifference to life, sweeps over his soul. In Cantos 54–57, where he faces full this Sphinx of Nature, Tennyson touches his lowest depths of spiritual anguish. The individual dies, the type itself perishes, and nature "red in tooth and claw with ravin" replies with cynical silence to the human cry: —

> **"Thou makest thine appeal to me,**
> **I bring to life, I bring to death.**
> **The spirit does but mean the breath,**
> **I know no more."**

In the presence of the wild law of chance and death and the blank ignorance of nature, the soul quivers with its nearest approach to uncontrolled despair. With a pleading cry, terrible in its absence of logic, for the soothing Voice forever stilled, it turns aside from this "wild singing" in the abrupt, final word of pain, " behind the veil, behind the veil." In the very moment of the "ave" for eternity it feels its passionate sorrow insulting to the calm of the beloved Dead, and wends its way to other regions, the hopeless cry unanswered. Far later, when many battles have been fought and won, new energy stored, new wisdom gained, the old thought rises again, but rises in the Body of the Resurrection. In the 118th canto, the poet broods once more over the mighty energy of nature, and the passage into seemingly ceaseless death of cycle after cycle of her creatures. But now her "seeming-random forms" have become to him the precursors of a higher being, through all her waste is manifest a purpose, and human love and truth are no longer "dying nature's earth and lime," but the immortal end of creation. The thought of evolution has come to Tennyson: in it he finds the solution of the seeming paradox of nature. It has reached him, so far as can be seen, not by the toilsome process of reasoning, but by deep subconscious processes. The fear of waste has turned to the sense of the generosity of life, and the intellectual triumph of the poem is won.

This method of double interpretation is at the very heart of the intellectual life of Tennyson: it is the key to his spiritual victory. Sometimes the aspect of faith comes to him as a gift, after long and seemingly remote brooding. Again, and perhaps more often, it is won by deliberate and resolute choice. In an open question, he claims the right to the hypothesis of consolation. It is easy for either the ascetic or the cynical impulse to brand him as insincere: yet effective life must be lived on some assumption. To refuse to affirm is, in the practical sphere of conduct, if not in the subtler sphere of thought, equivalent to denial, and denial runs the risk of the lie as keenly as the fullest assumption of faith.

The Venture of Faith.

"The Two Voices," precursor of "In Memoriam," turns a searchlight on Tennyson's attitude. It shows a nature that, setting towards faith, is open to every whisper of doubt and fear. The victory of the poem, though exquisitely rendered, is timorous and faint. Such as it is, it consists in pure appeal to the benefit of the doubt. The voice of denial has forced upon the soul all possible grounds of despair: the futility of life, the uncertainty of the Beyond, the universal darkness in which we live and move. Suddenly, the outraged soul turns upon its tormenter, reverses the argument, and silences the sneer: —

> "If all be dark, vague voice, I said,
> These things are wrapped in doubt and dread,
> Nor canst thou tell the dead are dead."

Since life may be eternal, it must be noble. Be-

lief being at least as rational as denial, those high, intangible instincts that touch us with mystic gleams beyond the ken of reason, turn the scale towards the life of faith. In like manner, the greater poem, "In Memoriam," is at last able to recognize the very darkness as divine. Even in the night of despair, the Power has been with him, —

> "Which makes the darkness and the light,
> And dwells not in the light alone." [1]
>
> "And out of darkness come the hands
> That reach through Nature, moulding men." [2]

"I am the doubter and the doubt," sings Emerson's Brahma: Tennyson too can hail Him: —

> "That which we all invoke to bless,
> Our dearest faith, *our ghastliest doubt;*
> He, They, One, All; within, without;
> The Power in darkness whom we guess." [3]

Doubt has become to him the source and mother of faith. The poets of art mark a brief and futile abandonment of the quest for truth: Tennyson resumes the main road of pilgrimage.

Neither Clough nor Arnold is more essentially agnostic in thought than he. His separation from them is not in temperament nor in method, but in conclusion. He marks the final stage of agnosticism, feeling its way towards faith. All three poets assume the impotence of the reason. Arnold elects eternal doubt, allows it to pass into practical denial, and shapes life and thought, when all

[1] Canto XCVI. [2] Canto CXXIV. [3] *Ibid.*

is said, on a negative assumption. Clough, wavering, entertains in reverent thought the positive hypothesis, but never surrenders himself to it. Tennyson chooses belief, deliberately forms his life on positive lines, and, led by will and feeling, enters the great world of spiritual faith. "In Memoriam" is the central and most representative poem of the century: it is the climax of the Poetry of Search.

### 5. *Decadence, or Promise?*

We have traced the advance of a poetry of disillusion. At once free from spiritual convention, and intent upon spiritual conviction, our modern poets are of necessity sad. It were easy to interpret even the earlier poets in a pessimistic sense; and if unclouded joy is rare among them, far more are those of the Age of Search poets of sorrow. Never surely was there verse so uncomforted as that of Clough and Arnold, so clear alike in its expression of spiritual need and its failure to find spiritual solace. In the poets of the æsthetic reaction, the whole cycle of beauty and feeling proves inadequate to exclude the clash of problem and the cry of death. The poetry of Tennyson, grave, steady, and delicately wrought, yet springs from no fount of inward joy. The highest point reached by the poetry of search is his desperate escape from the world where thought denies, to the world where faith asserts. Is ours, then, a poetry of failure? Is a minor strain all that the men of the future may hope for, to accom-

pany the stir of human life? So thinks M. Bourget. This eloquent and sensitive critic has a fine passage, in which, commenting on the complete agnosticism of modern literature, he allows himself to peer into the future. He speaks of the future of the race under the guidance of Science: science which "renders impossible any belief in supernatural revelation, and at the same time proclaims itself impotent to solve that problem which revelation formerly solved." "Some people," writes M. Bourget, "have imagined a cure for this singular new crisis with which we are threatened, by imagining a humanity freed from interest in the Beyond, and indifferent to what is called in scholastic terms the Absolute. This is a gratuitous hypothesis, little consistent with the general advance of human thought.

"We have the right to predict, on the contrary, that humanity as it proceeds will refine its nervous sensibility more and more, and will develop increasingly that blasé melancholy of souls whom no pleasure satisfies, and who long in there insatiable ardor to quench their thirst at an infinite source. It is probable that, facing the final bankruptcy of scientific knowledge, many of these souls will fall into despair such as would have seized Pascal had he been deprived of faith. The great black hole whence we emerge in pain, only to fall into it in pain once more, will yawn before them, forever black and forever empty. Then will revolts break forth, tragic, such as no other epoch has known. Life will be too intolerable with the

conviction that comprehension is over, and that the same question-mark is placed forever on the horizon. There would be nothing surprising if a sect of nihilists were in those times to organize itself, possessed with a rage of destruction such as those alone can imagine who have known the gulfs of metaphysical agony. To know that one cannot know, to be sure that one can never be sure, — ah! what atrocious anguish, which, spread like an epidemic among millions of men, might easily become the principle of a sort of crusade of destruction. In those times, if the nightmare which I have just evoked should be realized, other souls, gentler and more inclined to a happy interpretation of destiny, would doubtless oppose to pessimism in revolt an optimism sadly tranquil. If the enigma of the universe is unknowable, it might be solved in a way that would harmonize with the totality of our moral needs and sentimental demands. The consoling hypothesis has as much chance of being true as the hypothesis of despair. We have even to-day, in M. Renan, a complete example of the religious impulses which would rally the vague believers of that cruel age; and who would dare to affirm that the act of faith without formula, to which the disabused optimism of this historian of our dying religion even now amounts, does not express the essence of that which shall endure, immortal and pious, in the superb and miserable temple of the human heart?"

"Deceived by the malicious genius of nature," says M. Bourget again, "we press towards death,

believing that we press towards progress." "A universal nausea in the presence of the insufficiency of this world stirs the being of Slavs, Germans, and Latins, and manifests itself, in the first by nihilism, in the second by pessimism, among ourselves by solitary and bizarre forms of hysteria. The murderous rage of the conspirators of St. Petersburg, the books of Schopenhauer, the furious conflagrations of the Commune, and the fierce misanthropy of the naturalistic novel — I intentionally choose the most widely separated examples — all reveal this same spirit of negation of life which darkens more each day our western civilization. Doubtless we are yet far from the suicide of the planet, that supreme desire of the theorists of sorrow. But slowly, surely, is developed a belief in the bankruptcy of nature, which promises to become the sinister faith of the twentieth century, if science or an invasion of barbarians does not save a humanity which has reflected overmuch from the lassitude of its own thought.

"It would be a chapter of comparative psychology as interesting as it is inedited which should trace, stage by stage, the march of the different European races towards this tragic negation of all the efforts of all the ages."

It is, then, this march towards "the suicide of the planet" which is to be traced through our modern English verse? We recognize many notes in this eloquent description. Were we forced to judge from the two minor schools of Victorian verse whether ours is the poetry of decadence or of prom-

ise, the answer, though reluctant, would be sure. In its fervent, languid beauty, its conscious purism of phrase, its disintegration and incoherence, the stamp of a literary decadence rests upon it. Our modern poetry is the product of fifty years during which denial of spiritual truth in the name of science was the loudest if not the deepest sound. The calm tone of scientific denial, the rage against life, the gentle sadness of those who "choose the consoling hypothesis," — all these are known to us. The search of God is never abandoned by our poetry: but so far as we have yet followed it, a low "perhaps" is the clearest note of consolation. It may be that M. Bourget's "bankruptcy" awaits us all.

Meanwhile, we may remember that the Asia-Myth of the young Shelley does not end in the cave of Demogorgon. The journey of his Lady of Life, in whom we found the Spirit of Poetry, proves a pilgrimage of redemption, and ends on the mountain-summit where she is transfigured in the glory that shall enkindle the world. Has the English poetry of the nineteenth century known no power to redeem, no height of vision?

# VII

## THE TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT

### 1. *The Vision Attained*

TRIUMPH, or failure? Which is the conclusion? Out of the century which has developed plutocracy in government, competition in industry, agnosticism in religion, out of the century that has first named materialism, what is the message of the poets? A glad chorus of spiritual victory? Or a low cry of the imagination, bewailing the loss of the soul?

Our poets have been as great as ourselves. The singers of a democratic age, they have in no case dominated their time as Dante dominated the fourteenth century, Shakespeare the sixteenth. Taking them all in all, they have expressed it. Truly our brothers, no mood is known to us that they have not rendered; and all that has been vital to modern experience may be studied in their work.

All the influences of the century have passed into the being of the poets. The spirit of science has entered their very blood, harmonizing the instincts of the imagination with the conclusions of thought, widening poetic scope, and revealing the innate dignity of law. The social passion has led them from deeper reverence for the collective life

to keener knowledge of the separate soul. The new altruism has made itself felt in their ideal of redemption, while at the same time a spirit of more searching inquiry has invaded the soul. Widened knowledge of the past has opened to the poets roads trodden by many generations, where travel is swift if not smooth to the feet of the searchers for truth. A vivid enthusiasm for fact has strengthened our poetry by making it, not the esoteric expression of ideal or exceptional experience, but the broad and homely story of actual life, absurd often yet divine forever. Uncompromising, finally, in the region of fact, our poets have been equally audacious in the region of the idea; analyzing the soul with new fervor, they have revealed in it new subtleties, and, casting aside all spiritual conventions, have sought unwearying for spiritual truth.

Of all this poetry — enriched by science, by democracy, by the new learning — what is the outcome? Can we trace through it any continuous spiritual progress? Is it, in any sense, an organic whole? Or must we find in it, with all its varied power, the sporadic individualism of an age of disintegration and denial?

"Where there is no vision, the people perish," and even before the people, the poets must die. But our poetry is not dead. Its very sequence, practically unbroken for a hundred years, its superb vigor and variety, its hold on the English world, prove that a vision has been known to us. The poets at times have denied it; but thus to deny,

they must first have seen. Our modern poets emerge from that great spiritual movement which has been the central and deepest fact of modern life. Strongly influenced by science, by democracy, and by the past, it is the striving of the Spirit which makes itself supremely felt, through even the most sensuous or the most inert. Sorrowful indeed they are often, with a restless pain, but their very sorrow is the measure of their sight; for in an awakened age that seeks complacency in vain, doubt, question, and despair all find their place as minor yet essential witnesses to the supremacy of Soul.

But we may claim far more than indirect evidence. Failure, as a whole, is not the message of our poetry. Whatever despondency may invade or at times master the poets of the revolution, their central temper as their strongest instinct is a wide hopefulness. However spiritual pain and restlessness may control the minor schools of Victorian poetry, questioning in the greater poets leads direct from doubt to faith. In the clearest song both of the age of the revolution and the age of Victoria a spiritual vision is not only implied but revealed: and our great singers have been our great believers.

Our poetry rounds the full circle. The hope that animates the poets of the revolution is flashed upon them as intuition. Their faith in freedom, their love of man, are not results wrested from doubt by long experience, they are instincts breathed from the very air. As the ideals of the

time faded, or were hidden by earthly vapors, the song of the revolution was stilled. The scientific spirit appeared, emphasizing induction and development in the sphere of thought: and the epoch of joyous recognition was followed by a long period of verification, when "the intellectual power through words and things went sounding on a dim and perilous way." Hope was the word of the first of the century; but the word of its central years was doubt.

At last poetry works itself clear again. It escapes from the shadow country of introspection and the dream world of art into the fresh sunlight of fact and faith. Tennyson and Browning, the long journey of induction at an end, reach triumphantly the land of their desires. Tennyson, as we know, arrives after long pilgrimage in the twilight; but when he enters, he is like his own Sir Lancelot, blessed by sight of the distant, shrouded glory of the Holy Grail. Browning, his great compeer, has never forfeited the heavenly vision. He has audaciously explored the country of darkness, but faith has guided him into its blackest gloom. Despite his keen insight into doubt, and his masterly analyses of spiritual failure, his conviction of truth never wavers. Wordsworth at the beginning of the century marks the highest level of spiritual conviction, Shelley of spiritual rapture; Browning is supreme, alike in conviction and in rapture, at the end.

## 2. *The Faith of the Poets of the Revolution*

A high, solitary idealism marks the first epoch of our poetry: the central epoch is marked by a great realistic movement towards the crowded levels of humanity. It is natural that varying attitudes control the two epochs. In the early verse of the century, we breathe the atmosphere of peace. By a curious paradox, this poetry, offspring of a tumultuous historic event, is rarely or never militant. Perhaps the external stir of the revolution was not of its essence but a superficial accident; and the deep and silent causes which guide the imagination were rather a quickening of life, a widening of sympathy, a development of sensitiveness, for which the times were ripe. One must realize the world before seeking to conquer it. It was the realization of a new earth which occupied the poets of the revolution.

Verse Contemplative.

Hence they are, in central temper, receptive. The ideal to which they summon us, which in its highest moments they attain, is that of the contemplative life. Whether we pause in the sweet hill-pasture to hearken to the Highland girl with her echoing music, or wander through the forest-shadows which may at any instant relieve the moonraiment of Cynthia, our spirits watch and wait. Even the restlessness of Shelley, least tranquil among poets, is never active: it searches but never battles. Union with some vast power which shall still his spirit with its swift onward sweep is the quest of his tremulous aspiration.

Keats is the most perfect exponent of the spirit of contemplation on its æsthetic side. The "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the "Nightingale," "To Autumn," "To Melancholy," all the handful of brief, immortal lyrics, heavy with the weight of their own loveliness, are conceived in the spirit of impassioned contemplation. The beauty of these poems is able indeed "to teaze us out of thought as doth eternity." Endymion, Lysias, young Porphyro, enthralled by the spell, move dizzy as with sleep through a visionary world; bound in their dreams hand and foot. Let one of these dream-lovers move or act, and lo! he melts into the rude morning air of modern fact. They are creatures composed of sensations, and sensations how bewilderingly sweet!

> "Endymion could not speak, but gazed on her,
> And listened to the wind, that now did stir
> About the crispèd oaks full drearily,
> Yet with as sweet a softness as might be
> Remember'd from its velvet summer song." [1]

Such passion for fullness of Beauty must needs turn to Sorrow: —

> "O Melancholy, linger here awhile!
> O Music, Music, breathe despondently!
> O Echo, Echo, from some sombre isle
> Unknown, Lethean, sigh to us — O sigh!
> Spirits in grief, lift up your heads, and smile;
> Lift up your heads, sweet spirits, heavily,
> And make a pale light in your cypress glooms,
> Tinting with silver wan your marble tombs." [2]

The conception of perfect happiness is found in this picture of the Elysian fields of the poets, with

[1] *Endymion.* [2] *Ode to Melancholy.*

its delicate appeal to the luxury of every receptive instinct: —

"Bards of passion and of mirth,
Ye have left your souls on earth!
Have ye souls in heaven, too,
Doubled-lived in regions new?
Yes, and those of heaven commune
With the spheres of sun and moon;
With the noise of fountains wondrous;
And the parle of voices thund'rous;
With the whisper of heaven's trees
And one another, in soft ease
Seated on Elysian lawns,
Browsed by none but Dian's fawns;
Underneath large blue-bells tented,
Where the daisies are rose-scented,
And the rose herself has got
Perfume which on earth is not;
Where the nightingale doth sing
Not a senseless, trancèd thing,
But divine melodious truth;
Philosophic numbers smooth;
Tales and golden histories
Of heaven and its mysteries."[1]

If Keats gives us contemplation æsthetic, it is Wordsworth who gives us the ideal of contemplation ethical. High-priest of a new gospel, he bids men come forth from science and from art, dowered with a heart which watches and receives. A deep and healing Peace possesses us as we breathe the air of his poems.

"The chasm of sky above my head
Is heaven's profoundest azure: no domain
For fickle, short-lived clouds to occupy
Or to pass through; but rather an abyss

[1] *Ode* [written on a blank page before Beaumont and Fletcher's tragi-comedy, *The Fair Maid of the Inn*].

Wherein the everlasting stars abide,
And whose soft gloom and boundless depth might tempt
The curious eye to dwell on them by day." [1]

Wordsworth gives us, in noble lines, the summary of the themes on which his pure imagination sought to dwell: —

"Of Truth, of Grandeur, Beauty, Love, and Hope,
And melancholy Fear subdued by Faith,
Of blessed consolations in distress,
Of moral strength and intellectual power,
Of joy in widest commonalty spread,
I would give utterance in numerous verse." [2]

Here, to the sanest if not the greatest poet of the revolutionary period, is the gamut of human experience. We find in his summary no hint of action and no call to fight. For him is "the harvest of a quiet eye, that broods and sleeps on his own heart." The highest virtue is to Wordsworth Fortitude. Endurance under all shocks of change and pain, — this is the triumph achieved both by a rugged old Leech-gatherer and by that moonlight-creature, Emily: —

"A soul, *by force of sorrows high*
Uplifted to the purest sky
Of undisturbed mortality."
. . . . . .
The mighty sorrow hath been borne,
And she is thoroughly forlorn,
Her soul doth in itself stand fast,
Sustained by memory of the past
And strength of reason; held above
The infirmities of mortal love,
Undaunted, lofty, calm, and stable,
And awfully impenetrable." [3]

[1] *The Excursion*, Book III. [2] *The Recluse.*
[3] *The White Doe of Rylstone.*

Such the ideal for sorrow, an ideal admitting no self-assertion, no activity, even of the inner self, stern as the old Stoic gospel in the pure intensity of its calm. Passive thus in sorrow, Wordsworth's ideal is passive also in joy. He can delight in playful sympathy with the winsomeness of children or flowers, he can also rise into most solemn ecstasy. He is familiar with that state of exalted trance which as known to the mystic of every age and country is the reward of passionate stillness. Well does he know

> "That serene and blessed mood
> In which the affections gently lead us on,
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul;
> While with an eye made quiet with the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things." [1]

"The very heart of quietness" is in the poetry of Wordsworth. "The spiritual presences of absent things" were ever with him, as he recollected in tranquillity emotions and experiences which for many a lesser soul would have caused tranquillity to flee forever. He abides upon those heights where, as Goethe tells us, lies repose. As Dante gives us contemplation glorified in heaven, so Wordsworth gives us contemplation transfigured on earth. In his work the peculiar receptive temper of his age reaches fullest and loveliest expression.

[1] *Lines*, composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey, July 13, 1798.

The spirit of contemplation which pervades our early modern verse finds widest scope and happiest inspiration in the new converse with nature. Such converse, "strong and sanative," to use Wordsworth's fine phrase, renewed in men that temper of wonder which may indeed sink into curiosity, but may also rise into adoration. Thus it led direct to new spiritual intuitions, and became the very food of faith. But its first work was simpler. The wide return to nature sprang at first from an instinctive search for healing. Men craved "the blessed mood in which the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world is lightened." It is peculiarly touching that this modern world of ours, oppressed as no other age by the burden of its own self-consciousness, should have been first fully to express the restorative power of the vast, impersonal life of nature. The poets have been our guides and priests in her great temple. "The silence that is in the starry sky, the sleep that is among the lonely hills," bends over their work. From them we have learned to betake ourselves in moments of exhaustion to "pure organic pleasures," to escape from fret or puzzle as we stand in the Eternal Calm. And in times of despair nature can bring the one blessing — oblivion. The groves can indeed, as Wordsworth well knew,

The Contemplation of Nature.

> "Interpose the covert of their shade
> Even as a sleep, between the heart of man
> And outward trouble."[1]

[1] *The Prelude*, Book I.

But nature is far more than refuge from the Byronic ennui of passion or more modern ennui of thought: she breathes a fresh delight, positive and free. In this delight the receptive spirits of the early modern poets bathed joyously. Their sensitiveness to her blithesome gayety was a gracious gift, indeed, to a weary and serious world. It was a gift not new, but long forgotten. The affection for nature in Cowper and Thompson, pioneers of our modern feeling, is entirely sincere, but it is also eminently staid. Never for a moment does it lose sight of its own dignity. It is founded on the recognition of use rather than of beauty, and never gets beyond a tone of mingled condescension and respect. Abandon is unknown to its well-considered blank verse. A new note is sounded when Shelley can sing, with the easy lilt of the bird,

"I love all that thou lovest,
Spirit of Delight;
The fresh earth in new leaves drest,
And the starry night,
Autumn evening and the morn
When the golden mists are born;
I love snows and all the forms
Of the radiant frost.
I love waves and winds and storms,
Everything almost
Which is Nature's and may be
Untainted by man's misery."[1]

Equal rapture, more serene, may be found in Wordsworth, Keats, and Coleridge. The poets turn to nature as exiles to the dear land of child-

[1] *Song.*

hood, and something of the buoyant ecstasy of youth renewed and hope fulfilled sounds through their verse.

The perception of beauty is of course the chief and first happiness of the contemplative soul before nature, and this very perception is spiritual; for if poetry is, as Wordsworth describes it, the impassioned expression which is on the countenance of science, then beauty is the impassioned expression which is on the countenance of force. Existing quite out of the chain of natural causation, it gives mysterious challenge and perpetual witness that man is not only nourishable body evolved from the brute, but perceptive soul devolved from God. But it is with less of theory than of happy instinct that the poets rejoice in the fair world. This instinct is quickened and guided to higher reach by that modern intuition which sees in nature less a machine or a picture than an organism, throbbing with hidden and varied life, —

> "Not unrelated, unallied,
> But to each thought and thing allied
> Is perfect nature's every part,
> Rooted in the mighty heart." [1]

And so, feeling in the world of beauty Spirit and Life, the contemplation of nature becomes profoundly religious, and leads the poetry of the revolution to its highest spiritual victory and clearest vision of spiritual truth.

The poets of the day were ranged under varying

[1] Emerson, *Woodnotes.*

religious banners. Wordsworth was a technical Christian, Shelley a self-proclaimed atheist, Keats a pagan child unaware that creeds existed, Byron a scoffer at God and man. Coleridge belongs to a different order, but his creed, sincere in his prose, is simply æsthetic in his poetry. All are alike remote from true Christianity; for the formal allegiance of Wordsworth is scarcely more vital than the crude boyish antipathies of Shelley. Yet their religion, though not Christian, is passionate and profound. Despite their different labels, one faith, pure and strong, beats through their diverse work — through the poetry of the sedate Westmoreland proprietor, as through that of the erratic flame-like soul which wandered singing through Italy as Piccarda through Paradise. In days of a degenerate Church and an unawakened world, it was through the poets, more than through any other force, that faith returned to England.

Nature the Shadow of God.

The modern religion of humanity, which so honestly and earnestly seeks to supplant the religion of Christ, stirs in the strong racial consciousness that pervades them and in their reverent contemplation of man. But a higher because more worshipful religion is evident in their attitude towards the natural world.

Turning to nature first for rest and simple joy, they find in her the expression of a kindred life. But this life, though kindred, is inscrutable: —

> "And this loveliness divinest
> Shrouds thee, wheresoe'er thou shinest"[1]

[1] *Prometheus Unbound*, Act II. Scene 5.

cries Shelley to the Anima Mundi. The adoring recognition of a living Mystery at the heart of the world is the gift to faith of the early modern poets.

It was a gift made unconsciously but therefore all the more precious. For that which we can fathom we never can adore. Forgetfulness of this truth is the central sin of theology; it was peculiarly the sin of the theology of the eighteenth century. A dry Christianity, parched by analysis and formulæ, had for the time being chosen to be one with convention, and had lost power over men. It was the work of the poets to throw aside formulæ that they might recover adoration. "In wonder begins the soul of man" writes some one: "in wonder it ends; and investigation fills up the interspace." It is a new and spiritualized wonder that the poets restored to the English world. Concrete vision is essential to adoration, yet without mystery faith collapses into dogma. Restoring wonder, the poets renewed religion. An invented Deity, a Deity of the library, was not for them. They looked out on the world, expectant, receptive; and in the world of nature they found God.

But it was a Deity undefined. The intuition came to them of a vast spiritual Power behind all natural forms. To analyze this power they never attempted. To feel it moving through all things sufficed to the contemplative soul.

> "The secret strength of things
> Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome
> Of heaven is as a law, inhabits thee" [1]

[1] *Mont Blanc. Lines written in the Vale of Chamouni.*

cried Shelley to Mont Blanc. This "secret strength of things," hidden yet living, was perceived by the poets in tiniest as in mightiest expressions of the great whole of nature, in grass-blades as in stars. Such perception grew in glory, firmness, and assurance till it finds supreme expression in those familiar lines, solemn and heavy like a vast white cloud floating on high in the Heaven of spiritual knowledge, —

> "I have felt
> A Presence that upheld me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the Mind of Man —
> A Motion and a Spirit that upheld
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And moves through all things." [1]

We know how the whole conception of Asia, the "Light of Life," "Shadow of Beauty unbeheld," is that of the Anima Mundi, the Soul of the World. The "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," the "Adonais," the "Epipsychidion," alike reveal to us Shelley's clear apprehension that life and love, not death nor chance, were the hidden strength which burned, unknown, behind the veils of natural beauty: —

> "The awful shadow of some unseen Power
> Floats though unseen amongst us — visiting
> This various world with as inconstant wing
> As summer winds that creep from flower to flower,
> Like moonbeams that behind some piny mountain shower.

[1] *Tintern Abbey.*

It visits with inconstant glance
Each human heart and countenance;
Like hues and harmonies of evening, —
Like clouds in starlight wildly spread,
Like memory of music fled, —
Like aught that for its grace may be
Dear, and yet dearer for its mystery.

. . . . . .

"Thou — that to human heart art nourishment
Like darkness to a dying flame,
Depart not as thy shadow came,
Depart not — lest the grave should be
Like life and fear, a dark reality."[1]

Thus the heart of the poets forebodes a mystery; and the mystery is holy unto the Lord.

"Truly Thou art a God that hidest thyself." Such is their cry, exultant, not despairing. In the most literal and fullest meaning of the word, they are one and all essentially pantheists. The very breath that quickens the living movement of their verse is the intuition of a Life-giving Spirit; and this Spirit, reached through contemplation of nature rather than through analysis of man, is infinite as undefined.

But these interpreters of the religious consciousness of their age wear their rue with a difference. The consciousness of a central spirit of love and redemption is the religion of Coleridge's most vital poem, the "Ancient Mariner." Byron's animus is destructive; but when, under the influence of Shelley, he becomes for brief periods religious, he shudders in the presence of a mighty

[1] *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty.*

Force moving through the natural world. The creed of Keats is brief: —

> "Beauty is truth, truth beauty: that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." [1]

Of conscious religion he had none; but the manifestations of an archetypal loveliness float through his poems. Wordsworth's appeal is different still. He cries aloud in solemn words: —

> "Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe,
> Thou Soul that art the Eternity of Thought." [2]

While Shelley adores the One Presence, —

> "Which wields the world with never-wearied love,
> Sustains it from below, and kindles it above." [3]

Thus to Keats the Central Mystery appeals supremely as beauty, to Wordsworth as wisdom, to Shelley as love. Yet love, wisdom, and beauty are only symbols, and the mystery is in essence unknown.

It is in Wordsworth and Shelley that pantheism gains its highest reach, able to set free and exalt the spiritual impulse. To both alike, religion is wings and fire of life. Their faith is pure as that of Emerson, ethical as that of the finest natures in Buddhism. Living utterly in the Spirit, to them the material world is not only beauty but symbol, not only symbol but sacrament. Wordsworth tells us in great lines how first the intuition of an immanent God was vouchsafed to his boyish mind: —

[1] *Ode on a Grecian Urn.* [2] *The Prelude*, Book I.
[3] *Adonais.*

"I was only then
Contented, when with bliss ineffable
I felt the sentiment of Being spread
O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still;
O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of thought
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart;
O'er all that leaps and runs, and shouts and sings,
Or beats the gladsome air; o'er all that glides
Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself,
And mighty depth of waters. Wonder not
If high the transport, great the joy I felt
Communing in this sort through earth and heaven
With every form of creature, as it looked
Towards the Uncreated with a countenance
Of adoration, with an eye of love." [1]

Grand though this passage is, pantheism in its purity finds perhaps supreme expression in Shelley's "Adonais," that marvelous singing which draws out all there may ever be of consolation to the human need in the nebulous radiant faith in nature and in love.

"He is made one with Nature: he doth bear
His part, while the One Spirit's plastic stress
Sweeps through the dull, dense world, compelling there
All new successions to the forms they wear,
Torturing the unwilling dross that bars its flight
To its own likeness, as each mass may bear,
And bursting in its beauty and its might
Through trees and beasts and men into the Heaven's light." [2]

These lines mark the highest spiritual reach of the poetry of the revolution.

Thus the poets fed their souls on contemplation till it turned to worship; and leading men away

[1] *The Prelude*, Book II. [2] *Adonais.*

from scholastic formulæ, they brought them to delight in the world of fact and beauty, and hence to intuition of the Immanent God. The Spirit the Life-Giver.

The noblest thought possible to pure contemplation is gained by this group of poets. They developed the receptive powers to most subtle sensitiveness; they received, through nature, a new conception of God. Here the work vouchsafed them ended. Its limits are the inevitable limits of a contemplative ideal. Not one of them ever reached the perception of personality, either in man or God. In the treatment of man, Shelley never went beyond an abstraction, Wordsworth never beyond a type. In thought of God, they studiously avoided, so far as a human soul can achieve that paradox, all human qualities, and pause with Mystery and Life. It is this deficient sense of personality which keeps the poetry of the revolution free from any movement towards dramatic art. The deficiency is a necessary correlative of the attitude of contemplation; it is the invariable note of the pantheist.

There is a wider lack in their poetry. They lift us to the Mount of Vision, but they furnish us with no weapons to fight. Pantheism with them, as ever, is passive. We may be strengthened to endure or quickened to enjoy by Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley: we are never roused to act. They beheld in a sense the Beatific Vision: it was not for them, as for the saints in the Apocalypse, to go forth, nerved by the sight, to warfare with the foes of God. No militant trumpet-

notes mingle with the pure music of their hymns of praise.

The absence of the feeling for personality and of the motif of action clearly define the range and limits of the poetry of the time. It is a range quite outside the region of all then recognized as Christianity. Yet the faith of the poets, so far as it goes, is Apostolic and Catholic. Taking the great poetry of the revolution from first to last, it has one essential message. It bears witness to the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life.

The reassertion of the Spirit was the need of the age. Theology had come to ignore with placid negligence this great and final Article of the Christian Faith. The Church, ignoring it, had lost the power of progress and turned aristocrat, clinging to traditions of the past, instead of bold with faith for the future. From without her, not from within, was to come the renovating power. Suddenly, with mighty wind and with heat of visible flame, the Spirit manifested its presence, destructive, life-giving, holy. Aroused and quickened, the souls of the poets were then permitted to recognize its revelation, not only in an historic crisis, but in the normal energy of nature and of man. All other truth was veiled from them. This truth was theirs. Life could no longer be mechanical nor external: it was the breath of God. A world interpenetrated by a Divine and Living Soul! this is the holy vision of our early modern verse. Revealer of the Spirit! This is the greatest title which Wordsworth or Shelley can claim.

## 3. *The Faith of the Victorian Poets*

"No, when the fight begins within himself,
A man 's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,
Satan looks up between his feet. Both tug;
He 's left, himself, in the middle. The soul wakes
And grows. Prolong that battle through his life.
Never leave growing till the life to come." [1]

The note of a new age! "Im Anfang war die That," muses Faust, paraphrasing St. John. He would find scant response in the song of Wordsworth, Keats, or Shelley: his thought is echoed, with countless changes, in the poems of Tennyson, Browning, and Clough.

Verse Militant.

Passion for "the deed" is the very heart-throb of the tumultuous poetry of the Victorian age. Written on the very morrow of revolution, our Georgian poetry, even when tremulous with love of man and freedom, was receptive and serene. The cries of human pain it heard from afar, and wove into entrancing melody. Radical in ideal, it clung to that ideal contented with hope, scarcely seeking realization. Yet in its pure revolutionary idealism was latent that force which drove its successors out into the actual world. There they were to experience and depict conflicting passions; to learn to call nothing common or unclean; to reflect in the very form of their art the principles of Democracy; and to know in their own minds that intensely active battle whence the full peace of the future was to be won. Contemplation was the watchword of our earlier poetry: action is the cry of that which presses nearest to our lives to-day.

[1] *Bishop Blougram's Apology.*

The Georgian poets had set us free from the narrow limits of self-consciousness imposed on thought by the eighteenth century, and placed us in the wide, sweet presence of nature. They had led us to a superb abstract faith in man and freedom: they had taught us to adore the Unknown God.

Yet the contemplative ideal is useless if it lead not beyond itself. It must find in the service of action its true kingdom. Our poets were to pass from the receptive attitude towards the aggressive, from passion for abstract ideals to passion for concrete fact, from showing the power and significance of the impersonal life, to revealing the might of personality. The soul no longer lies passive and expectant till it be flooded by the truth: it grapples with its foes and presses upward, breathless, towards a remote ideal. The clash of spiritual forces sounds through the verse of Clough and Arnold, and the very lament of these spirits, fixed forever in unstable equilibrium, witnesses to their sense of the supreme value of the Act: —

"Go from the East to the West, as the sun and the stars direct thee,
Go with the girdle of man, go and encompass the earth;
Not for the gain of the Gold, the getting, the hoarding, the having,
But for the joy of the Deed, but for the Duty to do."[1]

Such is the challenge of Clough's hardy song. In Tennyson, naturally contemplative of temperament as Wordsworth himself, spiritual struggle

[1] *Hope Evermore and Believe.*

finds climax in an act of choice, and purity of deed, not truth of thought, is the key to life and wisdom. It is Browning himself who proclaims to us that he "was ever a Fighter:" without his testimony, we could not hesitate to recognize in the poet of Luria and Caponsacchi the protagonist of the battles of the soul. The earlier poetry of the century is contemplative even when most restless: the poetry of the Victorian age is militant even when most serene.

In pantheism there is neither growth nor change. All movement is the glimmer of breaking bubbles on the eternal ocean of Being. The nations of the East, wrapped in eternal rest, are to the world a perpetual image of Contemplation uninvaded by the consciousness of the Deed. The Analysis of Man.

But the Victorian age is dominated by the thought of Evolution: and this is a thought of supreme activity, and of unceasing strife. It is this thought, initiated by science, but swiftly passing out of the purely scientific domain, which has guided the age to new emphasis on personality. Poetry subsequent to 1830 practically ignored the most significant factor in the work of the earlier poets. Nature, which had been a theme of substantial and glorious independence, sank back again into a storehouse of illustration for the experience of man. The sense for the individual which has shaped democracy and created fiction may be clearly traced in its slow movement towards consciousness in the sequence of English

song. It is utterly absent from the pure subjectivity of Byron, or the world of revolutionary thinkers like Shelley, peopled with abstractions and ideals. Slowly its value is hinted, as Wordsworth contemplates, though through reaches of clear air which blend, while they reveal, essential and typical man. But contemporary life is upon us, and "the need of a world of men." Through the sense of struggle, through the interest in personality, our Victorian poetry becomes dramatic. It has shown vitality in the production of technical drama, through the work of Tennyson, Swinburne, and Browning: it has shown the strength of the dramatic impulse yet more vividly, in the creation of new artistic forms, and the suffusion of the old forms with a dramatic spirit. Its central type, the dramatic monologue, is a fusion of the dramatic with the reflective method. "The incidents of the development of a soul" become the only thing worth study; and through conflict alone character can emerge. Even the subjectivity of Clough and Arnold bears its own strange witness to the sacredness of personality. It is not egotistic like the subjectivity of Shelley; for through all subtleties of their verse runs the under-consciousness that they explore the adventures of the hidden life not only for themselves but for their brothers. Still, it is in the large work of Browning, objective and varied, that character makes itself felt in its full value, and the complete sense for personality is achieved. For Browning has one dominant impulse; his unvarying method —

> "Takes the least man of all mankind, as I,
> Looks at his head and heart, finds how and why
> He differs from his fellows utterly." [1]

It is Browning who leads us into the world of men: but it is Tennyson who more fully even than the poet of "The Ring and the Book," looks forward to the climax of evolution, the production of the crowning race, —

> "Of those that eye to eye shall look
> On knowledge: under whose command
> Is earth and earth's: and in their hand
> Is Nature like an open book." [2]

As Nature was the centre to the Georgian poets, around Humanity gathers all the poetry of the age of Victoria. The motif of personality, absent from the first great school of modern poets, has absorbed all others into itself.

The Conquest of Immortality.

Out of the sense for contemplation and abstractions, out of the shaping emotion of an historic crisis, developed the religion of Wordsworth and Shelley.

Out of the sense for action and for personality, out of the shaping thought of evolution, develops the religion of the Victorian poets.

The faith attained by our later poetry verifies the intuitions and fulfills the deficiencies of the faith of the earlier; and the vision won by Tennyson and Browning is perfectly the complement of that granted to the poetry of the revolution.

[1] Epilogue to *Dramatis Personæ*.
[2] *In Memoriam*, Epilogue.

Our Victorian poets have taken the supreme leap possible to the intellect of man. From the mortal they have inferred the immortal. In the face of the obvious facts of nature, of the tremendous reality of decay and death, they have proclaimed the wider fact, the higher reality of life eternal. They have seen man, buffeted to exhaustion in the heat of battle, —

"By the pain-throb triumphantly winning intensified bliss,
And the next world's reward and repose by the struggle of this."[1]

The Conquest of Immortality! By the poets of the revolution it is neither sought nor dreamed. Ever content with an impersonal ideal, they abide serene, at their best, in the eternal; the immortal there is no sign that they ever vitally conceived. Had personal immortality never occurred to the race, the great body of their inspired work might remain practically unchanged. The life to come is assumed at times in Wordsworth; it is never a controlling theme. Even his great Ode dwells simply on a Divine Source to our being, on our essential kinship with the spiritual world. A passage in the "Prelude" goes farther: —

"Whether we be young or old,
Our destiny, our Being's end and aim,
Is with infinity and only there —
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort and aspiration and desire,
And something evermore about to be."[2]

This points towards immortality, but does not arrive; and it marks the highest reach of Words-

[1] Browning, *Saul*.

[2] *The Prelude*, Book VI.

worth. If faith in personal immortality is outside his range, it is yet more strikingly ignored by Shelley. The poet of "Adonais" faces the final Mystery, and wins faith to him adequate and glorious in the vision of the soul of his friend become a portion of universal loveliness, and bearing his part in the plastic stress of the One Spirit. No expression of revolutionary poetry touches a higher level of spiritual passion than "Adonais:" none is more avowedly, joyously, and serenely pantheistic.

Not for one instant would this impersonal vision, with all its entrancing beauty, satisfy the soul of a Victorian poet. He might be unable to advance beyond it: he could never exult in it. Far more striking even than the conquest of immortality is the cry of longing for it, a cry which sounds through all our modern verse. Every one of the Victorian poets demands it with a strong and clamorous desire; those who miss it are doomed to perpetual unrest. The earliest great poem of Rossetti derives all its magic charm from the æsthetic assumption of Heaven; the denial of a celestial future darkens every page of Swinburne and Morris. The poets of doubt cry out on immortality, and, finding it not, take refuge in forced cheer or in blinded hope. Whether faith be attained or forfeited, the problem of the life to come is of supreme and haunting importance to every poet of the Victorian age.

The conquest of immortality has been no easy task. The Apostolic Succession of the Spirit was without, not within, the Church, and the poets

could rest in no serene tradition. Yet the victory has been won. Not by our minor singers. The pall of death rests on the beauty of the poets of art, and Clough and Arnold, seeking, may not find. But our greatest fight to win, and their faith shines invincible and clear. "In Memoriam," published in 1850, is the epic of immortality, the colloquy of Love between earth and heaven. Browning's faith is more resonant, if not more absolute.

> "Good, to forgive;
> Best, to forget;
> Living, we fret,
> Dying, we live.
> Fretless and free,
> Soul, clap thy pinion!
> Earth have dominion,
> Body, o'er thee."[1]

The faith which is won has nothing in common with the nebulous rapture of the earlier impersonal ideal. It is sharp, definite, and personal.

Tennyson passes far beyond satisfaction with pantheism in an early cycle: —

> "Eternal form shall still divide
> The eternal soul from all beside,
> And I shall know him when we meet."[2]

And if at the end of "In Memoriam" he returns to the high and rapturous sense that his friend is "mixed with God and Nature," he turns in the next moment to that safeguard of personality and that ethical appeal unknown to pantheism as he cries: —

[1] *La Saisiaz.*

[2] *In Memoriam,* Canto XLVII.

> "O living Will that shalt endure
> When all that seems shall suffer shock,
> Rise in the spiritual rock,
> Flow through our deeds, and make them pure." [1]

No return to the endless and wearying cycle of change contents the modern desire. The conscious life, strong in its integrity, must go forth into the Unseen, bearing with it all love and wisdom gained on earth, trusting that in the world of absolute knowledge all desire shall be fulfilled, all doubt justified, and all truth revealed.

It is the work of Browning, most militant of poets, that is most strongly pervaded and controlled by this great Faith. No fibre of his organic and vital poetry could endure, were the nerve force of faith in Immortality extracted. It is this faith which changes "The Ring and the Book" from the record of a petty and suffocating tragedy to the triumphant epic of the Spirit: —

> "O lover of my life, O Soldier-Saint,
> No work begun may ever pause with death,"

murmurs white Pompilia; and in her words we find strength to endure, not only the great agony fallen upon her innocent life, but also the greater agony of Guido, the reprobate, who in another world of less thwarted impulses may yet "touch God's shadow and be healed." "Rabbi Ben Ezra," the pæan of old age, the superb vindication of the worth of life looking onward through the tomb, is the counterpart of Wordsworth's Ode, the pæan of infancy, looking backward past

[1] Canto CXXXI.

the birth; but immortality, vague impulse to the poem of childhood, has become strong, grave, and clear conviction to the poem of age.

In this faith in immortality is found the climax and triumph of the long quest of the spirit, which we have traced through the sequence of our poets. The futility of aspiration and the folly of desire have eaten like a canker into their heart. In immortal life is the answer to the Fury-taunt flung at Shelley's champion of humanity: —

> "Dost thou boast the clear waters thou waken'dst for man?
> Then was kindled within him a thirst which outran
> These perishing waters: a thirst of fierce fever,
> Hope, love, doubt, desire, which consume him forever." [1]

In immortal life is the answer to the later cry of Swinburne: —

> "Thou hast given sleep, and stricken sleep with dreams,
> Saying joy is not, but love of joy shall be.
> Thou hast made sweet springs to all our pleasant streams;
> In the end, Thou hast made them bitter with the sea." [2]

In immortal life is found the answer to the wail of Arnold: —

> "We but dream we have our wished-for powers;
> Ends we seek, we never shall attain.
> Ah! some power exists there which is ours?
> Some end is there, we indeed may gain?" [3]

In immortal life the answer to the kindred wail of Clough: —

> "Or is it right, and will it do
> To pace the sad confusion through,

---

[1] *Prometheus Unbound*, Act I.
[2] *Atalanta in Calydon.*
[3] *Self-Deception.*

> **And say, It doth not yet appear**
> **What we shall be, what we are here."**[1]

For in immortal life alone is found hope of the synthesis sought in vain by the first renaissance and by the later renaissance of our own day: the reconciliation of peace with desire, of a perfect development with a spiritual ideal. We must open life upward into eternity would we accept all good, and sacrifice no aspiration. The perpetual paradox can find only one solution: the confidence that harmony is imperfect to finite vision only because planned on an infinite scale.

Thus the longing for immortality, unconscious at first, has become, as the century advanced, imperative and insistent. It has followed, in vital connection, the growing sense of the worth of personality. The spiritual sequence of our modern imagination shows long groping after the Life Eternal. For a time the search seems to end in a blank darkness; but at last the quest is rewarded, and the greatest and most earnest of our "pilgrims of eternity" force their way into celestial day.

The Cry for Redemption.

Our poetry has moved from contemplation to action, from nature to man, from satisfaction with this world to demand for the world to come. Long and arduous has been the journey; there can be no question of the end.

"The whole creation groaneth and travaileth together, waiting for the manifestation of the sons

[1] *Through a Glass Darkly.*

of God," it was once written. The words would be meaningless to the poetry of the revolution: they might serve as summary to the product of Tennyson and Browning.

The imagination of the early century ignored personality in man and God alike. It rested satisfied in an ideal passion for the race, in an intuition of a Spirit unknown, mysteriously felt through the shrouding glory of nature.

Time went on. The poets discovered the sacredness of personality in man; the poetry of character appeared, the idea of the personal life received an ever-increasing emphasis, till the conviction of its worth led to faith in its endurance even through the shock of death.

The pantheistic ideal of an all-informing life was sufficient to the first fresh religious ardor of a new childhood. It quickened and stilled at once the souls of the poets, and in mystic rapture of communion with the Universal Spirit was found full scope for their contemplative passion. But their contentment did not last, nor could their message long satisfy. Soon it gave place to a sense of vacancy and of desire.

For mystery, first essential of religion though it be, can never bring redemption. The later poets passed from the heights of peace into the clash and shock of thought which belongs to the modern world. As they came from solitude to men, a new sense, hardly traceable in the poets of the revolution, haunted them more and more. It was the sense of moral evil; to speak boldly, the

sense of sin. Sin is denied by Shelley, ignored by Keats, recognized but defended by Byron. Wordsworth initiates us into suffering, but leaves unsounded the depths of sin; we know the pain of Margaret, but we believe Peter Bell to be a bold, bad man simply because we respect the authority of his creator. Coleridge alone, of all the poets of the period, — and he is the only one among them vitally Christian, — gives us a wonderful study, psychological and symbolic, of crime, remorse, and expiation.

But visions of sin haunt the Victorian poets. The consciousness of moral evil is never absent from Clough and Tennyson; and sin is so intense a fact to Browning that it turns him dramatist, and furnishes all his best motifs. His poetry is simply an arena, where men fight wickedness within and without; nor were all their warfare sufficient, unless reinforced by divine redemption.

Thus seeking incentive to action and salvation into purity, Victorian poets demand of necessity a new conception of the Divine. A new need, ignored by our earlier poets, becomes consciously and bitterly felt.

At first as need only. We have seen how the imagination, moving from pantheist eternity to personal immortality, passed through a phase of loss and pain before arriving at the goal of its desires. The sequence could not be otherwise in this far greater quest. Here too, authority was for the poets of slight avail. Here too, the religion of nature ceased to satisfy. As it lost its

hold, the religion of the Gospels silently uttered a gracious appeal to the hearts of men. The poets, even when nurtured in the superior instincts of modern criticism, heard the appeal. A conscious desire for a God who might be known, for a salvation that might heal, began to sound through all the Victorian poetry. Shelley bemoans no vanished Christ; but Clough and Arnold, losing Him, are lost indeed. A wail of infinite sorrow, vainly suppressed, sounds through their verse: —

"Christ is not risen, no, —
He lies and moulders low;
Christ is not risen!
What though the stone were rolled away, and though
The grave found empty there?
. . . . . .
"Is He not risen, and shall we not rise?
Oh, we unwise!
What did we dream, what wake we to discover?
Ye hills, fall on us, and ye mountains cover!
In darkness and great gloom
Come ere we thought it is our day of doom;
From the cursed world, which is one tomb,
Christ is not risen!

"Eat, drink, and play, and think that this is bliss:
There is no heaven but this;
There is no hell
Save earth, which serves its purpose doubly well,
Seeing it visits still
With equalest apportionment of ill
Both good and bad alike, and brings to one same dust
The unjust and the just
With Christ, who is not risen.
Eat, drink, and die, for we are souls bereaved:
Of all the creatures under heaven's wide cope
We are most hopeless, who had once most hope,
And most belief-less, who had once believed —

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust,
As of the unjust, also of the just, —
Yea, of that Just One too!
It is the one sad gospel that is true —
Christ is not risen!

"And, oh, good men of ages yet to be
Who shall believe *because* ye did not see,
Oh, be ye warned, be wise,
No more with pleading eyes
And sobs of strong desire
Unto the empty vacant void aspire,
Seeking another and impossible birth
That is not of your own, and only mother earth,
But if there is no other life for you
Sit down and be content, since this must even do,
He is not risen."[1]

With equal distinctness, though bowed down perhaps by less solemn weight of anguish, Arnold voices the same cry: —

"Oh, had I lived in that great day,
How had its glory new
Fill'd earth and heaven, and caught away
My ravish'd spirit too!

"No thoughts that to the world belong
Had stood against the wave
Of love which set so deep and strong
From Christ's then open grave.

. . . . . .

"No lonely life had pass'd too slow
When I could hourly scan
Upon his Cross, with head sunk low,
That nail'd, thorn-crownèd Man!

. . . . . .

"And centuries came and ran their course,
And unspent all that time

[1] Clough, *Easter Day.*

Still, still went forth that Child's dear force
And still was at its prime.

"Ay, ages long endured His span
Of life — 't is true received, —
That gracious Child, that thorn-crowned Man,
He lived while we believed.

"While we believed, on earth He went
And open stood His grave.
Men called from chamber, church, and tent,
And Christ was by to save.

"Now He is dead! Far hence He lies
In the lorn Syrian town,
And on His grave with shining eyes
The Syrian stars look down." [1]

The desire for an ideal in which could be found incentive to action, the growing sense of the supreme sacredness of the human and the personal, blended with the passionate longing for redemption from moral evil to turn men aside from the intense but unmoral faith adequate to Shelley. They demanded a religion striking its roots deeper into the mystery of the being of man. Such a religion was ready to their hand: but alas! antiquity and convention had enswathed its life in forms, and the poets when first drawn to it, bewailed it as dead.

Christ the Revealer.

Despairing sense of loss and failure marks this stage in the spiritual evolution of our poetry. They do not mark its close. The poets of the pagan reaction turn aside with

[1] Arnold, *Obermann*.

conscious repudiation from Christianity, and the end of their message is death. Tennyson and Browning resume the quest, and do not pause till they find Him whom they seek.

It is through air dim with shadows that Tennyson, like his own Sir Percival, rides after the Holy Grail. Agnostic in temperament, of hesitating and critical spirit, he sojourns with his younger brothers for a long time in the land of doubt. Only under the stress of personal loss, and after long gropings and tarryings, does he attain to faith. And when he wins, it is by no triumphant conclusion of the force of the whole nature, mind, heart, and soul, but rather by a desperate, superb venture of Faith. Yet that the poet had a right to the venture, who can doubt?

In an earlier essay we touched on the intellectual aspect of "In Memoriam." We did not hint at those wide spaces where tentative assumption is justified by experience, and the verification of desire is found in that consciousness which must ever transcend reason. Taking the poem as a whole, passing beyond it into the entire achievement of Tennyson, we feel in him at once the man whose powers are set free. The modern disease of inaction never touches his fine spirit; a full if not a joyous life is expressed through all his work.

> "Help Thy vain worlds to bear Thy Light,"

is his final prayer; and we feel that the struggle has not been wasted which has led his spirit to recognize that the central mystery is shrouded not in darkness, but in the Light of God. His great

poem takes us into the Valley of the Shadow; but it is a valley full of tender and subtle gleams, such as no garish sunshine could reveal. It is the depth of his instinctive trust in the Divine Fatherhood that ever and ever reclaims him from despair. He sings the redemption and exaltation of the soul. His belief in immortality, clear, personal, and definite, has deeper source than mere desire: —

> "Strong Son of God, Immortal Love,
> Whom we, who have not seen Thy Face,
> By faith and faith alone embrace,
> Believing where we cannot prove" —

here is its foundation. Only in faith in the Immortal Love who is the Son of God, both human and divine, can earthly love be proved immortal. The Eternal must become human if man is to have assurance of his own eternity. "Because I live, ye shall live also," said Christ; the argument of Tennyson is after all not so very different from that of the Fourth Gospel. "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed," it is written again. Perhaps this last and greatest of the Beatitudes was the share of the dead Laureate.

But it is in Browning that Christianity finds its most joyous and undaunted exponent. From "Paracelsus" to "Ferishtah's Fancies" and "Asolando," a definite and devout Christianity shines through his work. No important poem is untouched by it, except when deliberately and for specific purposes excluded; and in the greatest poems, it is assumed supreme.

Nor is Browning's faith due to blindness. Through our Victorian poets we can trace the attitude towards doubt changing from fear and pain to a welcome almost exultant: —

> "You call for faith,
> I show you doubt, to prove that faith exists,
> The more of doubt the better faith, I say,
> If faith o'ercomes doubt." [1]

So cries Browning at last. To Tennyson, doubt is still the foe over whom faith wins uncertain victory. To Browning it is the Angel of the Most High, rendering possible moral character and spiritual progress. In his superb and unfaltering courage, he achieves a final ethical triumph over the enemies of growth, and secures full freedom. He attacks audaciously the darkest spiritual problems. Many vanish before his cheery voice; others are conquered, or sink into ignominious retreat. If now and again a world-old puzzle refuses to yield, the poet hastens serenely round it, and finds faith waiting on the other side.

Wordsworth, early in the century, gave us through the record of his own experience a prophecy of the spiritual progress to follow. Browning, through his more dramatic method, gives a summary of the spiritual progress that is past. All the forces which have played through our poetry are latent in his work. Pantheism is not unknown to him; it is indeed included by implication in his creed, and his early poems, written under Shelley's influence, are deeply colored by

[1] *Bishop Blougram's Apology.*

it. But the spirit whose dominant note is struggle could pause in pantheism only for a brief time. His profound feeling for human life leads him swiftly further. In his thought, the being of the soul as well as the being of the flower must find in God its perfect archetype. No human power, no human need, is wanting in His Infinite Being. Greater than personality because including as well as transcending personality; accessible, nay, responsive to worship, with divine tenderness pressing upon man a Revelation in terms which he can understand, — such is Browning's God.

One great sequence may be gathered from his works which faces full on Christianity and meets directly the most specific difficulties of the wide Christian ideal. Studying these superb and varied poems, with their range of insight and passion, we realize that we have reached the climax of the reflective poetry of our age; we have come also to the highest spiritual region attained by the modern poets. The series must include "Rabbi Ben Ezra" and "Abt Vogler," "Cleon" and "Karshish," "Caliban" and "A Death in the Desert," "Christmas Eve" and "Easter Day," and, finally and supremely, "Saul." Much more might be added, both fragments and wholes; but this one group, made up of poems comparatively short, will suffice to show the whole sweep of Browning's faith.

"Rabbi Ben Ezra" and "Abt Vogler" give us fundamental Theism, and proclaim Immortality as the one key to the fragmentary beginnings of earth. "Cleon" and "Karshish," companion-

poems, treat of the creeds of the Orient and of Greece — that is, of the highest paganism — in their relation to Christianity. With keenest dramatic and philosophical insight they show us the Incarnation, and the clear revelation of immortality in Christ, as the necessary fulfillment and complement of all that was best in the noble, hesitating, natural Theism of the ancient world. "Caliban" and "A Death in the Desert" are again companion-studies. As the former poems suggested the historic development of the Christian faith, these deal with the philosophical difficulties which it encounters. "Caliban" is a study in savage religion — anthropomorphism in crudest form, unlit by love, and unillumined by revelation. Through the exalted and tender monologue of the dying St. John, Browning has audaciously answered Strauss. In its assertion of the necessity of historic revelation as antecedent to a spiritual and transcendental conception, in its vindication of anthropomorphism, guided by love and sanctioned by fact, as the inevitable mode of faith for those still in the flesh, the poem explores with reverent power the most obscure and profound regions of intellectual Christianity. In "Christmas Eve" and "Easter Day," on the other hand, — poems published in 1850, the same year with "In Memoriam," — Browning faces the practical difficulties of the Christian life. The first poem is a discussion of tolerance, an effort to reconcile passionate belief in "the one chief best way of worship," found in Christ, with reverent recognition of the wideness of God's truth.

"Easter Day" attacks the yet more searching problem of the relation of the Christian to the world, and with terrible candor discusses and images Christ's Law of Renunciation.

Through all these poems, whether dealing with theory or practice, breathes a passionate, tender, and personal adoration towards the One Redeemer, not surpassed by the ardor of the first Christians, as hinted in the rude images on the dark walls of the Catacombs. But it is in "Saul" that the spiritual passion of Browning and of the century reaches its climax. The marvelous poem is a summary of faith. It reveals a vision that still to-day transcends all powers of human invention, as it transcended the powers of the little shepherd-David, who narrates how it was revealed. The theme is the ministry of wholesome faith to a soul that has sunk, as the soul of our age has seemed at times to sink, into spiritual despair. First, the sweet ministries of nature are invoked to Saul's aid by the music of David, as they have been invoked for us so often in these later days, by a more recent harmony. Then the dark King is summoned to the contemplation of the gentle sequence of the natural life of man, of the harvest, the burial, the bridal, — such scenes as those wherein the troubled soul of Wordsworth once found peace. The appeal becomes ringing, personal, summoning the memory of the life of action, power, kingship, and the hope of enduring fame: and still Saul, though stirred, is not healed. Then to David, passing beyond the range of mere

human knowledge, come intuitions of the Divine; and he speaks, as Shelley spoke to us, of an Immanent Deity, shining through all the forms of nature, revealed as Infinite Love and Infinite Law. But the pæan of life's widest glory fails to set free the soul bound by despair of its worth. Yet further David must pass: in exultant and ringing speech, which now sweeps forward unfaltering to the end, he proclaims the truth of immortality, the eternal radiance awaiting us through love's largess, beyond the tempered light of earth. And still his mission is not fulfilled, nor his vision ended. Still the Divine Love is not perfectly manifest; still Saul is not redeemed; still faith lingers doubtful, wanting the final seal.

"I believe it! 't is Thou, God, that givest, 't is I who receive:
In the first is the last, in Thy Will is my power to believe.
All 's one gift: Thou canst grant it, moreover, as prompt to my prayer
As I breathe out this breath, as I open these arms to the air.
From Thy will stream the worlds, life and nature, Thy dread Sabaoth:
*I* will? — the mere atoms despise me! Why am I not loth
To look that, even that in the face too? Why is it I dare
Think but lightly of such impuissance? What stops my despair?
This; — 't is not what man Does which exalts him, but what man Would do!
See the King — I would help him, but cannot, the wishes fall through.
Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow, grow poor to enrich,
To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would — knowing which,
I know that my service is perfect. — Oh, speak through me now!
Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst Thou — so wilt Thou!

So shall crown Thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost crown —
And Thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor down
One spot for the creature to stand in! It is by no breath,
Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue with death!
As Thy Love is discovered almighty, almighty be proved
Thy power, that exists with and for it, of being Beloved!
He who did most shall bear most; the strongest shall stand the most weak.
'T is the weakness in strength that I cry for! my flesh that I seek
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee: a Man like to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever! a Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee: see the Christ stand." [1]

God is found God to David "in the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul, in the clod." But for us who are men He must be found supremely in the Fashion of a Man. The Divine Love is hinted through nature ; but if we are to trust it utterly we must behold it proved stronger than all human love, and our mortal power to suffer shame unto death for our beloved must be equaled, nay transcended, by the evident Deed of God. Such is the message of David; it is the highest message that the poetry of the century can bring. The movement of "Saul" reflects the movement of the imagination of the age, and leads us to its final triumph. Only in the Christ can the love of God, which gleams through nature, be supremely revealed; only through Christ can the Fatherhood of God be known.

[1] Strophe XVIII.

### 4. *The Witness of the Spirit.*

Thus the cycle of our poetry is complete. We travel from the serene faith contemplative of Wordsworth at the beginning to the serene faith militant of Browning at the end. Mysticism and realism meet in the work of Wordsworth, who sees in life at once the natural and the divine. The imagination of the poets who follow gropes in vain among ideals of the past and in its own recesses for this great synthesis between the flesh and soul. By Browning alone, uplifted to wider outlook by clear faith in immortality, mysticism and realism meet again at last, and the full synthesis is achieved. The good of this world, the glory of the next, are alike his heritage.

Our English poetry of the nineteenth century moves from vision to vision, though between the heights lay an arid country, lightened only by mirage. The glowing intuitions of the Divine in man and nature which quicken and sustain our earlier poets are vindicated by a victory wrested out of sharp experience and bitter battle by the later and more militant men. But not only are these first intuitions verified: a faith is gained of more daring sweep, outward and upward. The early poetry of the century restored to the world the lost faith in a Universal Spirit, the source of life and love. The faith brought new freedom to the human soul. Strengthened by its might the imagination passed onward; out from contemplation to action, from solitude to fellowship, from

the impersonal to the personal life. The natural world opened into Eternity; the God, dimly descried through the forms of nature, was supremely manifest in the form of Man. After long searchings, the Witness of the Spirit was to the Father and the Son. From pantheism towards Christianity: this is the spiritual pilgrimage of our modern English poets.

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